

2 Thess 2:6, 7

2 Thes 2:6-7 what withholdeth--that which holds him back; "keeps him in check": the power that has restrained the man of sin from his full and final development, is the moral and conservative influence of political states [OLSHAUSEN]: the fabric of human polity as a coercive power; as "he who now letteth" refers to those who rule that polity by which the great upbursting of godlessness is kept down [ALFORD]. Here was something that hindered or withheld, or let, until it was taken away. This is supposed to be the power of the Roman Empire under Pagan Rome, which the apostle did not think fit to mention more plainly at that time; and it is notorious that, while this power continued, it prevented the advances of the Bishops of Rome to that height of tyranny to which soon afterwards they arrived. This mystery of iniquity was gradually to arrive at its height; and so it was in effect that the universal corruption of doctrine and worship in the Romish church came in by degrees, and the usurpation of the bishops of Rome was gradual, not all at once; and thus the mystery of iniquity did the more easily, and almost insensibly, prevail. The apostle justly calls it a mystery of iniquity, because wicked designs and actions were concealed under false shows and pretences, at least they were concealed from the common view and observation. By pretended devotion, superstition and idolatry were advanced; and, by a pretended zeal for God and his glory, bigotry and persecution were promoted. And he tells us that this mystery of iniquity did even then begin, or did already work. While the apostles were yet living, the enemy came, and sowed tares; there were then the deeds of the Nicolaitans, persons who pretended zeal for Christ, but really opposed him. Pride, ambition, and worldly interest of church-pastors and church-rulers, as in Diotrephes and others, were the early working of the mystery of iniquity, which, by degrees, came to that prodigious height which has been visible in the Church of Rome. The "what withholdeth" refers to the general hindrance; "he who now letteth," to the person in whom that hindrance is summed up. Romanism, as a forerunner of Antichrist, was thus kept in check by the Roman Emperor – Pagan Rome (the then representative of the coercive power) until Constantine, having removed the seat of empire to Constantinople, the Roman bishop by degrees first raised himself to precedence, then to primacy, and then to sole empire above the secular power. The historical fact from which Paul starts in his prediction was probably the emperor Claudius' expulsion of the Jews, the representative of the anti-Christian adversary in Paul's day, from Rome, thus "withholding" them in some degree in their attacks on Christianity; this suggested the principle holding good to the end of time, and about to find its final fulfilment in the removal of the withholding person or authority, whereupon Antichrist in his worst shape shall start up. The removal of the withholding power will be when the civil polity, derived from the Roman empire, which is to be, in its last form, divided into ten kingdoms (Re 17:3, 11-13), shall, with its leading representative head for the time being ("he who now letteth," Greek, "withholdeth," as in 2 Th 2:6), yield to the prevalent godless "lawlessness" with "the lawless one" as its embodiment. The elect Church and the Spirit cannot well be, as DE BURGH suggests, the withholding power meant; for both shall never be wholly "taken out of the way". Only he who now letteth will let--The italicized words are not in the Greek. Therefore, translate rather, "only (that is, the continuance of the MYSTERY of iniquity-working will be only) until he who now withholdeth (the same Greek as in 2Th 2:6) be taken out of the way" - "only (waiting, Heb 10:13) until he". Then it will work no longer in mystery, but in open manifestation. If we may rely upon the concurrent testimony of the fathers, it was the Roman Empire moreso the Pagan Rome.

Identifying the "Falling Away" of 2 Thess. 2

By [Marcos C. Thaler](#) on Friday, 31 January 2014 at 02:32

It has been argued forcefully among those who argue in favor of Dispensational-Futurist teaching, holding to a Pre-Tribulation Rapture, that the "falling away" of 2 Thessalonians 2:3 is not referring to an "apostasy" of the Church, but rather to a "departure" of the saints into the sky. This interpretation becomes an absolute requirement for those who wish to tenaciously hold to a pre-tribulation rapture doctrine, where the Church is removed from the earth prior to a supposed "7 year tribulation", and the Antichrist, or Man of Sin, shows up on the scene.

Pre-Trib Rapture proponents argue that the word "apostasia" for "falling away" means, "departure", therefore, this must mean that there will be a "departure" of the Church. Thomas Ice documents his "exegetical" views on why "apostasia" means a "physical departure" rather than an apostasy from truth: http://www.raptureready.com/featured/ice/TheRapturein2Thessalonians2_3.html

Allow me to emphasize: There is nothing wrong with the translation "departure". But it doesn't mean a physical departure in which Church saints disappear into the sky like a lightning bolt. The intended meaning of "departure here means: DEPARTURE OF THE FAITH...and we can clearly see this reality after Paul's death, when the apostasy crept into the Church and the Catholic Church was born as a result of this apostasy.

Apostasia comes from the verb *aphistemi* (to withdraw). In Hellenistic Greek it means political rebellion (Plutarch, Galba 1). In the LXX it has more the sense of religious apostasy (Josh 22:22; Jer 2:19). This is also the meaning in the NT (Acts 21:21; 2 Thess 2:3-12). Apostasia is *anomia* (2 Thess 2:3, 7: lawlessness, i.e. hostility to God's law, vs. 4). The consequence is lying (vss. 9, 11), error (vs. 11), injustice (vss. 10, 12) and perdition (vss. 3, 10). Paul's argumentation is based on Daniel 7, 8, 11. (See H. Schlier, "Apostasia," in *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum NT* 1:510-11.)

The above reasoning that says "apostasia" (meaning departure) means a physical departing of the church rather than departing from the faith is what one terms a root fallacy for which D. A. Carson (in *Exegetical Fallacies*) wrote:

"One of the most enduring of errors, the root fallacy presupposes that every word actually has a meaning bound up with its shape or its components. In this view, meaning is determined by etymology; that is, by the root or roots of a word."

Here is the proper definition of "apostasia":

"1. a falling away, defection, apostasy"

That is clearly the sense of the word rendered "a falling away" in 2 Thessalonians 2:3; likewise the occurrence rendered "to forsake" [Apostasia] Moses in Acts 21:21. It does not mean to physically depart, as in walking away from Moses.

So whether one wishes to interpret it "departure" or not, it matters not. Why? For the intended meaning is "departure" of what? Of the faith! It means "to forsake the faith--or forsake God's ways".

The context of 2 Thess 2 is an "apostasy", by the very nature of the passage. In 2 Thess 2:7, it says, "for the mystery of lawlessness doth already work".

So what exactly is/was this "Apostasy" or "Falling Away" in the Church?

Answer: The Apostasy that Paul was talking about was the decline of spirituality of the Church over the course of the next 5 centuries after Paul's death.

The one that was "holding back" the rise of Antichrist was the Roman Empire controlled by the Caesars. Once the Roman Empire was taken out of the way, the "man of sin" was revealed. The Roman Catholic Papacy! It was this gradual "falling away" of the Christian Church that allowed it to "evolve" into that mega blasted Roman Papal System, that "Little Horn" power that grew out of the 4th Beast, the Pagan Roman Empire, was established firmly in the 6th century, and ruled with temporal supremacy given to it by Justinian for 1260 year years.

The Holy Scriptures as well as history testifies that the elements of Catholicism were already brewing as early as the days of Paul, through the fusion of Church and State, Church craft and State craft, paganism and Christianity.

The Roman Catholic Church was "subverted" by the power of the state during the 2nd-5th centuries, but finally in the 6th century, it surfaced its head when the State gave the Roman Catholic Church full ecclesiastical jurisdiction, as "head of all the holy churches" and "corrector of heretics".

This is why Paul said that the "mystery of iniquity" was already at work. Paul was not in any way insinuating that this iniquity was within Judaism or Jerusalem, but rather "inside the Church".

The elements of Catholicism did exist in the 1st century. But this was the beginning of the mystery of iniquity predicted by Paul.

The inclusion of Apocryphal books among the time of the post-Nicene fathers, I believe, was partially a result of the "apostasia" predicted by Paul in 2 Thess 2. Also, the transfer of sanctity from the seventh-day of the week to that of the first, was also a sign of this apostasy beginning to brew in Paul's day:

"Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a FALLING AWAY [apostasia] first, and that man of LAWLESSNESS be revealed, the son of perdition...For the MYSTERY OF LAWLESSNESS [or INIQUITY] is ALREADY AT WORK; only He who now restrains will do so until He is taken out of the way." (2 Thess 2:3, 7)

It is argued that the Holy Spirit is the one that "restrains" or "holds back" the Antichrist. In a sense, this is true, as the Holy Spirit influences men on the earth to do certain things. Yet, the very power that the Holy Spirit used to "hold back" the rise of the Papacy, was the Pagan Roman Empire.

"Paul distinctly tells us that he knew, and that the Thessalonians knew, what that hindrance was, and that it was then in existence. The early Church, through the writings of the Fathers, tells us what it knew upon the subject, and with remarkable unanimity affirms that this "let," or hindrance, was the Roman empire as governed by the Caesars; that while the Caesars held imperial power, it was impossible for the predicted antichrist to arise, and that on the fall of the Caesars he would arise. Here we have a point on which Paul affirms the existence of knowledge in the Christian Church. The early Church knew, he says, what this hindrance was. The early Church tells us what it did know upon the subject, and no one in these days can be in a position to contradict its testimony as to what Paul had, by word of mouth only, told the Thessalonians. It is a point on which ancient tradition alone can have any authority. Modern speculation is positively impertinent on such a subject." [1] (Romanism and the reformation: from the standpoint of prophecy, by Henry Grattan Guinness, Hodder and Stoughton, 1887, pg. 194)

[1] As to the "let" or hindrance to the manifestation of the "man of sin" referred to in 2 Thess. ii., Mr. Elliott says: "We have the consenting testimony of the early Fathers, from Ireneus, the disciple of the disciple of St. John, down to Chrysostom and Jerome, to the effect that it was understood to be the imperial power ruling and residing at Rome." — "Horae Apocalyptica;," vol. iii., p. 92.

Far more evidence can be produced that, despite the heresies and falling away of the Church Fathers THEMSELVES, they were all UNANIMOUS that the one "restraining" or "holding back the rise of Antichrist, was the Roman government under the power of the Caesars.

Michael Scheifler does a profound job at documenting the writings of the Church Fathers on what Paul meant by the restrainer in this following website: <http://biblelight.net/fathers-on-antichrist.htm>

Mr. Scheifler concludes in the above website:

"The testimony is clear, the early church fathers quoted above generally expected the Antichrist to rise to power very soon after the fall of pagan Rome as prophesied in the book of Daniel, chapter 7. At the time that Paul wrote to the church at Thessalonica, the Caesars ruled, and until they were removed they restrained the Antichrist from rising to prominence and exercising his power. This is why Paul could not speak openly about the restrainer in his letter, because he did not want to invite unnecessary persecution by identifying Rome openly and predicting its demise. Pagan Rome's rule ended in 476 A.D., so the above fathers were writing, in some cases, hundreds of years before the event, demonstrating that they understood prophecy, at least on that point.

There is only one entity that fulfills the timing spoken of by Paul, and expounded upon by the above quoted church fathers, which rose in prominence after the fall and division of the Roman empire in the 5th century, and subsequently took control of both civil and ecclesiastical governments, ruling for 1260 years (3 1/2 times) exactly as prophesied, and that is the papacy of the Roman Catholic Church, from 538 A.D. to 1798 A.D."

But now let us get a deeper glimpse into what this "apostasia" or "falling away" was all about:

John also recognized this lawlessness as already transpiring:

"Little children, it is the last time: and as ye have heard that antichrist SHALL COME, EVEN NOW are there MANY antichrists [BEGINNING OF FALLING AWAY]; whereby we know that it is the last time. They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us." (1 John 2:18, 19)

John also recognizes that this "spirit of antichrist" was "already in the world" (1 John 4:3)

But according to Paul, these men would "rise up" in the leadership, drawing away the disciples after themselves:

"Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. For I know this, that AFTER my DEPARTURE SAVAGE WOLVES will come in AMONG YOU, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will RISE UP, speaking perverse things, to DRAW AWAY the disciples after themselves." (Acts 20:28-30) -- this seems to have an analogous comparison to the "beast" "rising up" out of the sea in Revelation 13, beginning in verse 1--for which the mysterious elements of the Papacy were beginning to "brew" until full maturity into the man of sin, the son of perdition.

Thus we see, once again, what Paul could have only meant by "falling away". It makes no sense for Paul not to clarify the meaning of the word if he meant "departure" in light of all his other texts that discuss a "drawing away".

Notice here that the word "departure" is used by Paul in verse 29. And what word does he use? Does he use "apostasia" like he does in 2 Thess 2? Not in the least! He uses the Greek word "aphixis", which properly means to "depart" and "arrive somewhere else".

This expresses a rise of apostate leaders to the head of the Church. This was the "rising up" of the Roman Catholic system, slowly but surely, to finally manifest itself fully in the 6th century. These scriptures predict the rise up of men in leadership positions, which includes Bishops, Popes, and Prelates, who would draw away the disciples after themselves. They also include the heathenistic teachings that begin to infiltrate into many of the writings of the early church fathers, such as Justin Martyr, Ireneaus, Hippolytus, Tertullian, Origen, Hermas and Clement of Rome, Clement of Alexandria, Cyril of Jerusalem, Jerome, and even St. Augustine. Many such men could be added to this list, as these men were gentiles who came from heathen backgrounds and were immersed in the Hellenistic schools of philosophy. Although converted to Christianity, they could not help but bring their philosophical mindsets into Christianity, as they began to "weave" these thoughts into Christian teaching, slowly, but surely, and imperceptibly over the next several centuries. These men were the "architects" of the Roman Catholic Church, for which Roman Catholicism depends to defend their heretical teachings.

These Catholic Fathers of the Church were responsible for the development of doctrines such as the list given below:

- Candles
- Holy Water
- Penance
- Monkery
- Rosaries
- Pilgrimages
- Image/Statue Worship
- Devotions to Saints
- Sunday Sacredness

- Veneration of Mary
- Invocation of Virgin Mary and of Saints
- Incense
- Latin Mass
- Purgatory
- Required Celibacy of the Priesthood
- Kissing the Pope's toe
- Canonization of Saints
- Baptism of Bells
- Transubstantiation
- Indulgences
- Dispensations

- The need for an Inquisition to deal with heretics (contrary to 2 Thess 3:14-16; Romans 12:17-21)-Adoration of the Wafer -Doctrine of Purgatory

- The Immortality of the Soul (the dead know everything, and are not really dead – contra Ecc. 9:5)

- Eternal Torment (Tertulian created these ideas and derived his ideas of the immortality of the soul from Plato)

- The Immaculate Conception of Mary

- Confession to a Priest (contra scriptures, where we confess our sins to one another) for actual sin absolution.

- Elevation of the host

- Worship of the cross, images and relics

- Papal usurpation and the Temporal Power of the Popes and Supremacy of the Bishop of Rome

- Veneration of Angels and Dead Saints

- Prayers of the Dead

- The Sign of the Cross

....and I could go continue on providing additional heresies that emanate from this vile system of iniquity as a result of the "falling away" that ensued over the next 5 centuries after the Apostles passed away on the seen.

"For many deceivers are entered into the world, who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist." (2 John 1:7)

"But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction. And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of. And through covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you: whose judgment now of a long time lingereth not, and their damnation slumbereth not." (2 Peter 3:1-3)

These false teachers that "shall be" (future) would be manifested in the rise of clergy, including such men as Pope Callistus who, started out as a slave, and climbed his way up to the top through dishonest money handling. Then we have Pope Damasus I (366 - 384) who has been charged for many various crimes. Persons who questioned any Church doctrine had their lands seized and family sacrificed through being tortured and burnt alive. Former female priests and their children were used as sex slaves to provide income for the Church. He was found guilty by 44 bishops of adultery but used his position to obstruct justice after which he murdered the bishops.

Continuing,

"Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints. For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ." (Jude 1:3-4)

We see here that Jude is reflecting the language of Peter, yet Jude brings attention that what Peter had placed in the future was already beginning to manifest in the time Jude was penning his epistle.

"Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron." (1 Timothy 4:1-2)

It is only a matter of consistent logic. If these heresies that were damnable already began in the days of the Apostles, then surely it is not far fetched to believe that many of the Church Fathers in the latter centuries were also infected with these heresies.

Paul connects this to the "falling away", or "apostasia". Yet when John referred to Antichrist and Antichrists in 1 John 2 and 2 John 1, he made it very clear that these Antichrists were among the Church, who "went out from US".

Jesus said that "The gates of hell shall not prevail against His church." (Matthew 16:18)

This is the reasoning used by the Roman Catholics that anyone that goes "out from them" physically, must be false, for Christ's Church prevails and continues. This faulty logic is on part of the Catholic Church for looking at their Church from a liturgical sense, and organizational structure.

Yet, as we have discovered while we may have to "physically" separate ourselves from a certain body, God's record book records it that, spiritually, they "went out from us".

It is unfortunate to say, that whenever I have brought up 2Thess 2:3-7; 1John 2:18, 19; 1John 4:3; Acts 20:27, 29 [cf. Rev. 13:13:1]; 2John 1:7; 2Peter 3:1-3; Jude 1:3-4; and 1Timothy 4:1-2, they seem to go unnoticed.

I have tried to reason with those who attempt to trace the Catholic Church back to the apostles. But the confusion lies in a proper conceptual understanding of how God interprets true lineage. While Protestants understand true lineage in a spiritual sense, that is, carrying on the work of Christ and reflecting His character,

Roman Catholics look at it from a literalistic perspective, through a physical line of leaders, handing down a literal scepter. But such reasoning does not "compute" with the above texts, predicting a steady rise in apostasy among the leadership.

With this in mind, Roman Catholics do not consider that their interpretations of apostolic succession must be rewritten.

God has a church. It is not the great cathedral, neither is it the national establishment, neither is it the various denominations; it is the people who love God and keep His commandments. *"Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them"* (Matthew 18:20). Where Christ is even among the humble few, this is Christ's church, for the presence of the High and Holy One who inhabiteth eternity can alone constitute a church.

The idea that because Christ promised to be with His church until the end of time must mean that it is the same successive line of Church leaders, or Popes, reaching to the end of time, is a fabrication and misapplication of Christ's words. There is not the slightest intimation that what constitutes Christ's Church is based on some imaginary apostolic succession in such a fashion as Catholics imagine it.

It just doesn't work that way. And we are desperately trying to help you Catholics see this. But it has become very difficult to help many of you grasp these points, because you have a strong tendency to look at things so literalistically, rather than spiritually. You will spiritualize and allegorize literal language, such as the New Jerusalem coming down from heaven, but then when it comes to Christ's Church, you literalize this to mean a direct successive line of Papal leaders all the way until the end.

There may be times where God's people (His true Church) may have to separate themselves from a main body. This is why in Revelation 14:8 and 18:2, 5, we are told to "come out of her my people". It means God has people inside of apostasy. And they are to come out.

Yet, in God's record books, even though we are to "come out" physically, He registers it as though the ones we separated from were the ones that "went out from us" (1 Jn 2:19), spiritually.

So Christ's spiritual lineage continues, all the way to the end of time. Although there may be men along the way, who "rise up" (that is, rise up to leadership status) and "draw away the disciples after themselves" (Acts 20:29, 30)

Yet God's true Church "continues"---even though they may have had to separate from the fallen leadership.

Christ's Church never falls. But men, who take on the responsibilities of leadership may fall, and the organized structure that is associated with them, may also fall. But this is not "Christ's Church" falling. What is falling is a manifestation of a false Church that has attempted to usurp and replace Christ.

Daniel 8 is very very clear that Christ's heavenly sanctuary would be trampled upon, and truth would be cast down to the ground. This was to be expected.

When John the Revelator stated the following concerning the Church of Ephesus, we see that there is a principle that God CAN remove a Church, and call new people to take their place:

"Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent." (Revelation 2:15)

God's true Church is never dependent on liturgical, or the passing down of ranked clerical statuses. It has to do with a spiritual lineage, of all those who obey God, love Him, and keep His commandments. It is a spiritual lineage. They may be invisible in the sense that their specific structure is not standing out in the open, but they are visible in the sense that their fruits are manifest everywhere.

Christ's true Church included those who fled to the wilderness during the Dark Ages. These included the Waldenses, Albigensies, Huguenots, certain Bohemians, etc. etc., along with Churches in the east, small groups in Rome that fled to the mountains, Churches in Africa, Churches in Asia, Churches even in northern Europe and in Ireland. Most of these Churches spread abroad were fairly consistent in their teachings. None of them were 100% free from error, and some of them did pick up erroneous theories, but on an overall scale, they were far more free from the heresies that had permeated the Roman Catholic system.

Rome and Alexandria were the two bedrocks of paganism.

Conclusion:

Based on a comprehensive analysis of 2 Thess. 2 and a host of other passages, we discover that the "falling away" or "apostasia" represents a defection or apostasy of the Christian Church over a period of the next 5 centuries, which "evolved" and "matured" into that man of sin seated on the Chair of St. Peter---the full manifestation of the mystery of iniquity, or lawlessness. It does not mean a physical departing of the Church into the sky. Such language does not even flow with the obvious context and meaning of 2 Thessalonians chapter 2. The meaning here given, incidentally, was held unanimously by all the Church Fathers. Their view was clear, that the power holding back the rise of Antichrist was the Roman Empire.

Early Church Fathers on the Timing of the Rise of Antichrist

- 2 Th 2:1 Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him,
- 2 Th 2:2 That ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand.
- 2 Th 2:3 Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition;
- 2 Th 2:4 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, showing himself that he is God.
- 2 Th 2:5 Remember ye not, that, when I was yet with you, I told you these things?
- 2 Th 2:6 And now ye know what withholdeth that he might be revealed in his time.
- 2 Th 2:7 For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way.
- 2 Th 2:8 And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming:
- 2 Th 2:9 Even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders,
- 2 Th 2:10 And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved.
- 2 Th 2:11 And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie:
- 2 Th 2:12 That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness.

Note that in the above passage, Paul tells the church at Thessalonica that the second coming is not near, that there must be a falling away from the faith, a great apostasy that must happen first. Second, the man of sin, the Antichrist must be revealed, but he was being prevented from rising to power by an entity that the Thessalonians already knew about (v.6), because Paul had already told them about it (v.5).

Paul distinctly tells us that he knew, and that the Thessalonians knew, what that hindrance was, and that it was then in existence. The early Church, through the writings of the Fathers, tells us what it knew upon the subject, and with remarkable unanimity affirms that this "let," or hindrance, was the *Roman empire as governed by the Caesars*; that while the Caesars held imperial power, it was impossible for the predicted antichrist to arise, and that on the fall of the Caesars he *would* arise. Here we have a point on which Paul affirms the existence of knowledge in the Christian Church. The early Church knew, he says, what this hindrance was. The early Church tells us what it did know upon the subject, and no one in these days can be in a position to contradict its testimony as to what Paul had, by word of mouth only, told the Thessalonians. It is a point on which ancient tradition alone *can* have any authority. Modern speculation is positively impertinent on such a subject.¹

¹ As to the "let" or hindrance to the manifestation of the "man of sin" referred to in 2 Thess. ii., Mr. Elliott says: "We have the consenting testimony of the early Fathers, from Ireneus, the disciple of the disciple of St. John, down to Chrysostom and Jerome, to the effect that it was understood to be the *imperial power* ruling and residing at Rome." — "Horae Apocalypticae;" vol. iii., p. 92.

Romanism and the reformation: from the standpoint of prophecy, by Henry Grattan Guinness, Hodder and Stoughton, 1887, [pg. 194](#).

St. Justin Martyr (c. 100-165)

DIALOGUE WITH TRYPHO

CHAPTER XXXII -- TRYPHO OBJECTING THAT CHRIST IS DESCRIBED AS GLORIOUS BY DANIEL, JUSTIN DISTINGUISHES TWO ADVENTS.

... and he whom Daniel foretells would have dominion for a time, and times, and an half, is even already at the door, about to speak blasphemous and daring things against the Most High. ...

Source: <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0128.htm>

St. Irenaeus of Lyons (c. 130-202)

Adversus haereses (inter A.D. 180/199)

Book V, Chapter 26

John and Daniel have predicted the dissolution and desolation of the Roman Empire, which shall precede the end of the world and the eternal Kingdom of Christ. The Gnostics are refuted, those tools of Satan, who invent another Father different from the Creator.

1. In a still clearer light has John, in the Apocalypse, indicated to the Lord's disciples what shall happen in the last times, and concerning the ten kings who shall then arise, among whom the empire which now rules [the earth] shall be partitioned. He teaches us what the ten horns shall be which were seen by Daniel, ...

Source: <http://newadvent.org/fathers/0103526.htm>

Book V, Chapter 30

Moreover, another danger, by no means trifling, shall overtake those who falsely presume that they know the name of Antichrist. For if these men assume one [number], when this [Antichrist] shall come having another, they will be easily led away by him, as supposing him not to be the expected one, who must be guarded against.

2. These men, therefore, ought to learn [what really is the state of the case], and go back to the true number of the name, that they be not reckoned among false prophets. But, knowing the sure number declared by Scripture, that is, six hundred sixty and six, let them await, in the first place, the division of the kingdom into ten; then, in the next place, when these kings are reigning, and beginning to set their affairs in order, and advance their kingdom, [let them learn] to acknowledge that he who shall come claiming the kingdom for himself, and shall terrify those men of whom we have been speaking, having a name containing the aforesaid number, is truly the abomination of desolation. ...

3. It is therefore more certain, and less hazardous, to await the fulfillment of the prophecy, than to be making surmises, and casting about for any names that may present themselves, inasmuch as many names can be

found possessing the number mentioned; and the same question will, after all, remain unsolved. For if there are many names found possessing this number, it will be asked which among them shall the coming man bear. It is not through a want of names containing the number of that name that I say this, but on account of the fear of God, and zeal for the truth: for the name Evanthas (EUAN QAS) contains the required number, but I make no allegation regarding it. Then also Lateinos (LATEINOS) has the number six hundred and sixty-six; and it is a very probable [solution], this being the name of the last kingdom [of the four seen by Daniel]. For the Latins are they who at present bear rule: ...

Source: <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0103530.htm>

Tertullian (2nd-3rd Century)

For the mystery of iniquity doth already work; only he who now hinders must hinder, until he be taken out of the way." What obstacle is there but the Roman state, the falling away of which, by being scattered into ten kingdoms, shall introduce Antichrist upon (its own ruins)? "And then shall be revealed the wicked one, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of His mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of His coming: even him whose coming is after the working of Satan, with all power, and signs, and lying wonders, and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish."

Source: <http://newadvent.org/fathers/0301.htm>

CHAP. XXXII.

There is also another and a greater necessity for our offering prayer in behalf of the emperors, nay, for the complete stability of the empire, and for Roman interests in general. For we know that a mighty shock is pending over the whole earth--in fact, the very end of all things threatening dreadful woes---is only retarded by the continued existence of the Roman empire. We have no desire, then, to be overtaken by these dire events; and in praying that their coming may be delayed, we are lending our aid to Rome's duration.

Source: <http://newadvent.org/fathers/0301.htm>

Hippolytus (3rd Century)

TREATISE ON CHRIST AND ANTICHRIST.

25. Then he says: "A fourth beast, dreadful and terrible; it had iron teeth and claws of brass." And who are these but the Romans? which (kingdom) is meant by the iron--the kingdom which is now established; for the legs of that (image) were of iron. And after this, what remains, beloved, but the toes of the feet of the image, in which part is iron and part clay, mixed together?

And mystically by the toes of the feet he meant the kings who are to arise from among them; as Daniel also says (in the words), "I considered the beast, and lo there were ten horns behind it, among which shall rise another (horn), an offshoot, and shall pluck up by the roots the three (that were) before it."

And under this was signified none other than Antichrist, who is also himself to raise the kingdom of the Jews.

He says that three horns are plucked up by the root by him, viz., the three kings of Egypt, and Libya, and Ethiopia, whom he cuts off in the array of battle. And he, after gaining terrible power over all, being nevertheless a tyrant, shall stir up tribulation and persecution against men, exalting himself against them. For Daniel says: "I considered the horn, and behold that horn made war with the saints, and prevailed against them, till the beast was slain and perished, and its body was given to the burning of fire."

26. ...

27. As these things, then, are in the future, and as the ten toes of the image are equivalent to (so many) democracies, and the ten horns of the fourth beast are distributed over ten kingdoms, let us look at the subject a little more closely, and consider these matters as in the clear light of a personal survey.

28. The golden head of the image and the lioness denoted the Babylonians; the shoulders and arms of silver, and the bear, represented the Persians and Medes; the belly and thighs of brass, and the leopard, meant the Greeks, who held the sovereignty from Alexander's time; the legs of iron, and the beast dreadful and terrible, expressed the Romans, who hold the sovereignty at present; the toes of the feet which were part clay and part iron, and the ten horns, were emblems of the kingdoms that are yet to rise; the other little horn that grows up among them meant the Antichrist in their midst; the stone that smites the earth and brings judgment upon the world was Christ.

Source: <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0516.htm>

St. Cyprian of Carthage (3rd Century)

TREATISE XI.

EXHORTATION TO MARTYRDOM, ADDRESSED TO FORTUNATUS.

PREFACE.

1. You have desired, beloved Fortunatus that, I since the burden of persecutions and afflictions is lying heavy upon us, and in the ending and completion of the world the hateful time of Antichrist is already beginning to draw near, I would collect from the sacred Scriptures some exhortations for preparing and strengthening the minds of the brethren, whereby I might animate the soldiers of Christ for the heavenly and spiritual contest.

Source: <http://newadvent.org/fathers/0507.htm>

Lactantius Firminianous (4th Century)

Divine Institutions (Divinae Institutiones)

Book VII, Chapter 25, OF THE LAST TIMES, AND OF THE CITY OF ROME:

These are the things which are spoken of by the prophets as about to happen hereafter: ... The subject itself declares that the fall and ruin of the world will shortly take place; except that while the city of Rome remains it appears that nothing of this kind is to be feared. But when that capital of the world shall have fallen, and shall have begun to be a street, which the Sibyls say shall come to pass, who can doubt that the end has now arrived to the affairs of men and the whole world? It is that city, that only, which still sustains all things; and

the God of heaven is to be entreated by us and implored -- if, indeed, His arrangements and decrees can be delayed -- lest, sooner than we think for, that detestable tyrant should come who will trader-take so great a deed, and dig out that eye, by the destruction of which the world itself is about to fall.

Source: <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/07017.htm>

St. Cyril of Jerusalem (c. 315-386) Doctor of the Church

Catechetical Lectures

LECTURE XV.

ON THE CLAUSE, AND SHALL COME IN GLORY TO JUDGE THE QUICK AND THE DEAD; OF WHOSE KINGDOM THERE SHALL BE NO END, DANIEL vii. 9--14.

12. But this aforesaid Antichrist is to come when the times of the Roman empire shall have been fulfilled, and the end of the world is now drawing near. There shall rise up together ten kings of the Romans, reigning in different parts perhaps, but all about the same time; and after these an eleventh, the Antichrist, who by his magical craft shall seize upon the Roman power; and of the kings who reigned before him, three he shall humble, and the remaining seven he shall keep in subjection to himself. At first indeed he will put on a show of mildness (as though he were a learned and discreet person), and of soberness and benevolence: and by the lying [108] signs and wonders of his magical deceit a having beguiled the Jews, as though he were the expected Christ, he shall afterwards be characterized by all kinds of crimes of inhumanity and lawlessness, so as to outdo all unrighteous and ungodly men who have gone before him displaying against all men, but especially against us Christians, a spirit murderous and most cruel, merciless and crafty. And after perpetrating such things for three years and six months only, he shall be destroyed by the glorious second advent from heaven of the only-begotten Son of God, our Lord and Saviour Jesus, the true Christ, who shall slay Antichrist with the breath of His mouth, and shall deliver him over to the fire of hell.

Source: <http://newadvent.org/fathers/310115.htm>

St. John Chrysostom (c. 347-407) Doctor of the Church

Homilies on Second Thessalonians

HOMILY IV. 2 THESSALONIANS ii. 6--9.

"And now ye know that which restraineth, to the end that he may be revealed in his own season. For the mystery of lawlessness doth already work: only there is one that restraineth now, until he be taken out of the way. And then shall be revealed the lawless one, whom the Lord Jesus shall slay with the breath of His mouth, and bring to nought by the manifestation of His coming: even he whose coming is according to the working of Satan."

ONE may naturally enquire, what is that which withholdeth, and after that would know, why Paul expresses it so obscurely. What then is it that withholdeth, that is, hindereth him from being revealed? Some indeed say, the grace of the Spirit, but others the Roman empire, to whom I most of all accede. Wherefore? Because if he meant to say the Spirit, he would not have spoken obscurely, but plainly, that even now the grace of the Spirit, that is the gifts, withhold him. And otherwise he ought now to have come, if he was about to come when the gifts ceased; for they have long since ceased. But because he said this of the Roman empire, he naturally

glanced at it, and speaks covertly and darkly. For he did not wish to bring upon himself superfluous enmities, and useless dangers. ... And he did not say that it will be quickly, although he is always saying it--but what? "that he may be revealed in his own season," he says, "For the mystery of lawlessness doth already work." He speaks here of Nero, as if he were the type of Antichrist. For he too wished to be thought a god. And he has well said, "the mystery"; that is, it worketh not openly, as the other, nor without shame. For if there was found a man before that time, he means, who was not much behind Antichrist in wickedness, what wonder, if there shall now be one? But he did not also wish to point him out plainly: and this not from cowardice, but instructing us not to bring upon ourselves unnecessary enmities, when there is noting to call for it. So indeed he also says here. "Only there is one that restraineth now, until he be taken out of the way," that is, when the Roman empire is taken out of the way, then he shall come. And naturally. For as long as the fear of this empire lasts, no one will willingly exit himself, but when that is dissolved, he will attack the anarchy, and endeavor to seize upon the government both of man and of God. For as the kingdoms before this were destroyed, for example, that of the Medes by the Babylonians, that of the Babylonians by the Persians, that of the Persians by the Macedonians, that of the Macedonians by the Romans: so will this also be by the Antichrist, and he by Christ, and it will no longer withhold. And these things Daniel delivered to us with great clearness.

"And then," he says, "shall be revealed the lawless one." And what after this? The consolation is at hand. "Whom the Lord Jesus shall slay with the breath of His mouth, and bring to nought by the manifestation of His coming, even he whose coming is according to the working of Satan."

Source: <http://newadvent.org/fathers/23054.htm>

St. Jerome (c. 340-420) Doctor of the Church

Commentary on Daniel, Chapter 7, Verse 8:

"... We should therefore concur with the traditional interpretation of all the commentators of the Christian Church, that at the end of the world, when the Roman Empire is to be destroyed, there shall be ten kings who will partition the Roman world amongst themselves. Then an insignificant eleventh king will arise, who will overcome three of the ten kings, ..."

Source: http://www.tertullian.org/fathers/jerome_daniel_02_text.htm

Letter CXXIII

TO AGERUCHIA (409)

16. But what am I doing? Whilst I talk about the cargo, the vessel itself founders. He that letteth is taken out of the way, and yet we do not realize that Antichrist is near. Yes, Antichrist is near whom the Lord Jesus Christ "shall consume with the spirit of his mouth." "Woe unto them," he cries, "that are with child, and to them that give suck in those days." ...

17. ... For thirty years the barbarians burst the barrier of the Danube and fought in the heart of the Roman Empire. Long use dried our tears. For all but a few old people had been born either in captivity or during a blockade, and consequently they did not miss a liberty which they had never known. Yet who will hereafter credit the fact or what histories will seriously discuss it, that Rome has to fight within her own borders not for glory but for bare life; ...

Source: <http://newadvent.org/fathers/3001123.htm>

St. Augustine of Hippo (345 - 430) Doctor of the Church
City of God, Book XX, Chapter 19

For what does he [Paul] mean by "For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now holdeth, let him hold until he be taken out of the way: and then shall the wicked be revealed?" [2 Thess 2] I frankly confess I do not know what he means. ... However, it is not absurd to believe that these words of the apostle, "Only he who now holdeth, let him hold until he be taken out of the way," refer to the Roman empire, as if it were said, "Only he who now reigneth, let him reign until he be taken out of the way." "And then shall the wicked be revealed:" no one doubts that this means Antichrist.

Source: <http://newadvent.org/fathers/120120.htm>

The testimony is clear, the early church fathers quoted above generally expected the Antichrist to rise to power very soon after the fall of pagan Rome as prophesied in the book of Daniel, chapter 7. At the time that Paul wrote to the church at Thessalonica, the Caesars ruled, and until they were removed they restrained the Antichrist from rising to prominence and exercising his power. This is why Paul could not speak openly about the restrainer in his letter, because he did not want to invite unnecessary persecution by identifying Rome openly and predicting its demise. Pagan Rome's rule ended in 476 A.D., so the above fathers were writing, in some cases, hundreds of years before the event, demonstrating that they understood prophecy, at least on that point.

There is only one entity that fulfills the timing spoken of by Paul, and expounded upon by the above quoted church fathers, which rose in prominence after the fall and division of the Roman empire in the 5th century, and subsequently took control of *both* civil and ecclesiastical governments, ruling for 1260 years (3 1/2 times) exactly as prophesied, and that is the papacy of the Roman Catholic Church, from 538 A.D. to 1798 A.D.

Pope Pius IX (1846-1878) gave this remarkable testimony, which when examined in conjunction with Daniel chapter 7, precisely identifies the little horn, the man of sin, the Antichrist power:

La Chiesa Cattolica fondata e istituita da Cristo Signore per provvedere alla salvezza eterna degli uomini, avendo conseguito, in forza della sua divina istituzione, la forma di società perfetta, deve godere, nell'esercizio del suo sacro ministero, di quella libertà che la sottrae alla soggezione di qualsivoglia potere civile.

Poiché per operare liberamente, come era necessario, doveva fruire di quei supporti che rispondevano alle condizioni e alle esigenze dei tempi, per una speciale disposizione della divina Provvidenza avvenne che, quando l'Impero Romano si dissolse e fu diviso in vari regni, il Romano Pontefice, costituito da Cristo capo e centro di tutta la Chiesa, ottenne un Principato civile.

Questo fu disposto con somma sapienza da Dio stesso, perché in mezzo ad una tale moltitudine e varietà di sovrani temporali, il Sommo Pontefice disponesse di quella libertà politica che era indispensabile per

esercitare, senza alcun impedimento, il suo potere spirituale, la sua autorità e la sua giurisdizione sul mondo intero. – Pius IX, Apostolic Letter [Cum Catholica Ecclesia](#), March 26, 1860.

The Catholic Church which was founded and instituted by Our Lord Jesus Christ to procure the eternal salvation of men, has, by reason of this divine institution, the form of a perfect society. Therefore, she must possess liberty such that she cannot be subject to any civil power in the execution of her sacred ministry.

To act with freedom, as it is just she should, she has always needed the assistance which was suitable to the conditions and the necessities of the age. It is, therefore, by a particular decree of Divine Providence that, at the fall of the Roman Empire and its partition into separate kingdoms, the Roman Pontiff, whom Christ made the head and center of his entire Church, acquired civil power.

Certainly, it was by a most wise design of God Himself that in the midst of so great a multitude and variety of temporal princes, the Sovereign Pontiff enjoyed political liberty, which is so necessary for him to exercise his spiritual power, his authority, and his jurisdiction over the whole world.

Source: *Papal Teachings: The Church*, selected and arranged by the Benedictine Monks of Solesmes, translated by Mother E. O'Gorman, R.S.C.J., Manhattanville College of the Sacred Heart, St. Paul Editions, Boston, © 1980, 1962 by Daughters of St. Paul, Library of Congress catalog card number 62-12454, par. #225, [page 160](#).

This is a common Protestant view on Antichrist from over 280 years ago:

Q. *Is the Pope Antichrist ?*

A. If he be not *Antichrist himself*, he is *vilely like him*; though we mean; not so much *one single Man*, as the whole *Polity and Hyrarchy of Rome*. We have had *above twenty Archbishops and Bishops* of the *Church of England*, since the *Reformation*, who have expressly asserted that *Rome is Babylon*, and the *Pope Antichrist*. And the *Homilies* themselves do not obscurely *intimate* the same. 'Tis the avowed *Faith* of all the *Foreign Protestant Churches*, and has been so in all *Ages*: The poor *Waldensees*, the *Bohemians*, and the Followers of *Wickliff* here in *England*, held the same. But *Argument* is the best *Authority*; and it is thus argued, that he is the *great Antichrist*.

— 'Tis granted that the ὄτι ἀντίχριστος the *Adversary* that *exalts himself against*, and in the *Seat* of God, is the same with this ἀντίχριστος, or *Antichrist*, Christ's *Vicar*, or rather, his *Rival* in the *World*. But this *Man of Sin*, this *Son of Perdition*, if anywhere in the *World*, is to be found at *Rome*, all the *Marks* the *Holy Spirit* gives exactly agreeing:

— *The Man of Sin exalts himself above all that's called God*;

— so does the *Pope*,

— above *Kings* and *Emperors*, earthly *Gods*:

— The *Man of Sin* sits in the *Temple of God*, *shewing*, or *making Ostentation* of himself, that he is *God*:

— So, to a Tittle, does the *Pope*, who is placed upon the holy *Altar*, and solemnly *adored*; nay, whom they call, *Our Lord God the Pope*.

— There was something which did *let*, in the *Apostles* time, why this *Man of Sin* should not immediately *appear* in the *World*; and something must be removed or taken out of the *Way*, before it could be done; and something which for some Reason or other, the *Apostles* thought not *fit* more plainly to mention

— All which is interpreted by the *ancient Fathers* themselves, of the *Roman Power* and *Empire*: This *Empire* is now taken away,

— that which *succeeds* in its room, and whose *Power* was hindered from *appearing* while that remained, must be *Antichrist*:

— This belongs, without dispute, to the *Pope*, therefore he is *Antichrist*.

— [published in 1728](#)
