

“Paul’s Mystery Restrainer”

Special Edition

2 Thessalonians 2:3-7

Mr. Jim Fitzgerald

April 26, 2019

Jim: Lord, we just thank You this morning especially, Lord, for Your Scriptures. They are wonderful, Lord, they are amazing. We thank You that You’ve revealed so many things, Lord, beyond our comprehension in Your word. And we ask You to bless this morning. Give us ears to hear. Guide us by Your Holy Spirit as we cover this information.

Lord, we pray for John Rodgers. We ask You to be with him, to bless him, to bless Blanche. Father, bless Bruce to his full recovery. And Lord, bless Jeff as he teaches today. And Lord, comfort Dean and his family at the loss of his brother. We ask You to guide us now and give us grace, Lord. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

Brave Men: Amen.

Jim: I want to begin with a question. But first I want to say that I’m really grateful for this opportunity. We’ve got lots to cover.

The title is “Paul’s Mystery Restrainer.” It comes from the seminar. We’ve got seven sessions in my seminar, and this is one of them. So we’ve got a lot to cover. We’ll try to get through it this morning.

And I begin with a question. What is the purpose of history? Any takers? I don’t see Don here today.

Transcriber’s Note: Don Nemit.

Jim: I was going to say that he couldn’t do it. If you haven’t been to the seminar, what would be some opinions on what the purpose of history is?

Sig: To teach us so we don’t repeat the same mistakes.

Jim: That’s a common view.

Ted: To cover those mistakes.

Jim: Yes. Any others?

Bill: To keep a record.

Jim: Okay.

Sig: Speak up.

Brave Man: Or we can run around the room.

Sig: To keep a record? Somebody said that?

Don: To keep a record, yes.

Jim: I’m looking for a Biblical answer here. Yes?

Brave Man: It’s just a continuous demonstration of who He is.

Jim: Okay. That’s good.

Brave Man: Instruction.

Jim: Structure?

Brave Man: Instruction.

Jim: Instruction? Okay.

Brave Man: God’s unfolding plan of redemption.

“Paul’s Mystery Restrainer”

Jim: Yes. And I say it a little bit differently. But I think that’s great. I say that the purpose of history is the completion of the Great Commission on planet Earth. And it’s really helpful when you think about history in that way. It starts with Genesis 3:15. Right after the Fall God promises a Savior to the world.

Transcriber’s Note: Genesis 3:15: ESV. *“I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her Offspring. He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel.”*

Jim: We go all the way to Matthew. At the very end of Matthew’s Gospel, Jesus on Mount Olivet is talking about “And when this gospel is preached to the whole world, then the end will come.” So you can see from Genesis 3:15 to that point that everything in history—all people, all places, all events,—ultimately are working out God’s plan of redemption, the completion of the Great Commission.

And I think that it’s so important that we see history that way, that we see God’s handiwork in history. This week I was reading about a German theologian. Maybe some of you have heard of him. His name is Welhausen. He wrote a book in the late 1800s that basically undermined faith in the West. He wrote that the Scriptures were really not inspired by God, but that they were written basically by committee. And it was an evolving process. He was influenced by Darwin. He discounted all prophecy. He discounted the reality of Adam and Eve. And in effect what we just said is the purpose of history would not be true.

And even among believers I think that it has so infected the church. There’s the liberal church, which basically doesn’t believe the authority of Scripture. But I think that even we as believers will be so skeptical when it comes to thinking about things like God’s providence in history and the fact that He really is working out His plan to the degree that He is.

And so I have a Scripture here. It’s Luke 12:56. And Jesus said to the Jews at that point that He called them hypocrites.

Transcriber’s Note: Luke 12:56: NKJV. *“Hypocrites! You can discern the face of the sky and of the earth, but how is it you do not discern this time?”*

Jim: He said, “You can read the signs of the weather, but you cannot understand the times you’re living in,” because they really weren’t looking at it from a Biblical perspective. And they didn’t understand the Scriptures.

And I think that we, even as Christians, we can look at history like we’re really pagans. You know, we just don’t see God at work. And I have several examples I wanted to throw out.

One was from a few years back. I downloaded it onto my phone because I didn’t want to buy the book. It was something called *The History of the Peloponnesian Wars*. Has anybody ever heard of that book?

Ted: No. I’ve heard of the Peloponnesian wars.

Jim: It’s a famous little book, hundreds and hundreds of years old, written in the B.C. period. I could get it for free. I downloaded it, and I thought just out of curiosity that I’d read this book. And as I began to read the book, it starts in 500 B.C. and the preceding era before that.

“Paul’s Mystery Restrainer”

I could see how God was shaping events to bring Alexander. Of course Alexander comes around 320-something B.C., or 330. He’s in the Old Testament. He’s prophesied to come in the Old Testament. And so looking at that history you can begin to see God at work, moving things to fulfill that prophecy.

More contemporarily, I’ve got one on the battle of Gettysburg, Stonewall Jackson. You know, if Stonewall Jackson had not been killed in the battle before Gettysburg the South may very well have won Gettysburg. Slavery would not have been abolished and the United States of America would probably be in two parts, even today. That’s significant because, as you’ll see later, God has a purpose for our unity. It’s much greater than we would ever generally stop and think about.

And Jackson was a Christian. He knew his life was in God’s hands providentially. He was never afraid. He was killed by what appeared to be an accident, shot by his own men.

World War I. I recently heard the president of Hillsdale, a great Christian school. He was on the radio on a Friday morning after our meeting. And they were talking about World War I. And I think it was the 100th anniversary that had just passed. And he made the statement that World War I accomplished nothing because it led up to World War II.

But actually, Biblically, that’s absolutely not true. And I was kind of stunned when he said it. In World War I the Turks were allies of Germany. And they looked at World War I as a jihad. And the British conquered Jerusalem and took back the Holy Land which had been under Islamic control, under Turkish control for over 500 years. And of course that sets up Biblical prophecy. It had to happen.

World War II. Not only then had the land been taken back. With World War II because of the Nazi Holocaust, the world was ready to allow the Jews to go back to their land. Without those two wars that wouldn’t have happened. But that was setting up prophecy.

Now Scripture basically gives us five providential conditions that would need to be in place for the time of Christ’s return. Would anybody have any idea what any of those five might be? Five essential necessary conditions that would need to be in place in the world to set up the time for Christ’s return.

Rich: Israel as a nation?

Jim: Yes. That’s one.

Sig: Say it again.

Jim: Israel as a nation. And the reason for that is that you can go back to Luke 21:24, when Jesus said that at the time of Rome’s destruction of Jerusalem, 70 A.D., which the Lord had prophesied, which Daniel had prophesied, he said that the Jews would be scattered around the world until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled, the implication being that they come back. What people can conceivably maintain their identity for 2000 years of being dispersed around the world, let alone come back to where they were? It’s just one of the most amazing prophecies that Christ ever gave. All right, so that was one. What’s another one?

Okay, the retaking of Jerusalem. Why would that be important? Because that’s where Armageddon takes place. The Jews will be attacked by antichrist. The Lord Jesus will land on the Mount of Olives during the battle of Armageddon. The Jews had to be back in the city.

“Paul’s Mystery Restrainer”

Technology has to be in place to control all the buying and selling in the world. That’s what John says in chapter 13 of Revelation, that antichrist will have the power to control all buying and selling. Now would that have ever been possible before our day? No. We can see the technology now shaping up. It’s really very close that soon you can track and control all the buying and the selling in the world, a development that would never have been possible, even conceivable, before now.

Ted: Jim, what verse is that in Revelation?

Jim: That would probably be Revelation 17, maybe.

Brave Man: Revelation 13:17.

Transcriber’s Note: Revelation 13:16-17, NKJV. *“He causes all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a mark on their right hand or on their foreheads, and that no one may buy or sell except one who has the mark or the name of the beast, or the number of his name.”*

Jim: That’s 13:17. That’s what I meant, 13:17. Right. That helps.

Caleb: You have knowledge increasing. Knowledge increases with the Internet—

Jim: Well yes, that’s another one. But that’s kind of hard to define. That’s one that Daniel would have said. But that would be a good one. Yep.

Weapons of mass destruction with the capability of removing all life from Earth. When would that have happened before our time?

Ted: What verse would that be?

Jim: Well, that would be in Revelation. And it doesn’t say it quite that way. But in Revelation 6:8 and 9:15 it describes two wars that basically take the lives of half the world’s population.

Transcriber’s Note: Revelation 6:8, NKJV. *“So I looked , and behold, a pale horse. And the name of him who sat on it was Death, and Hades followed with him. And power was given to them over a fourth of the earth, to kill with sword, with hunger, with death, and by the beasts of the earth.”*

Revelation 9:15, NKJV. *“So the four angels, who had been prepared for the hour and day and month and year, were released to kill a third of mankind.”*

Jim: You know, we don’t even think about these things. You know, these are right there in Scripture. You know, do we believe Scripture? I mean, again we’ve been so influenced by the guy that I mentioned before, which undermines our faith in the revelation of God.

And then what’s the last one? And to me this is really the great one. This is the key one. This is the one that we should all be aware of. Jesus said it in Matthew 24, verse 14.

Transcriber’s Note: Matthew 24:14, NKJV. *“And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come.”*

Jim: And this gospel shall be preached to the whole world. And when that’s done, then the end will come. Back in 2000 Wycliffe started to say that all the languages of the world would finally be translated, including all the smallest dialects, as early as 2025. Something that has been going on for almost 2000 years was actually coming to fruition basically in this generation, in line with all these other conditions.

“Paul’s Mystery Restrainer”

All right. So with that background the passage that we’re going to study today is Paul’s prophecy about the lawless one who is antichrist, whom John would call the beast. It’s in 2 Thessalonians 2, verses 1-12.

Transcriber’s Note: 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12, NKJV. *“Now, brethren, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, we ask you, not to be too shaken in mind or troubled, either by spirit or by word or by letter, as if from us, as though the day of Christ had come. Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition, who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God. Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you these things? And now you know what is restraining, that he may be revealed in his own time. For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; Only He who now restrains will do so until He is taken out of the way. And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord will consume with the breath of his mouth and destroy with the brightness of His coming. The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders, and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie, that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.”*

Jim: We’re going to focus on, as the note said and taught, verses 3-7. And basically Paul’s letter was written in response to concern by the believers that either Christ’s coming was right at hand, or He’d already come and somehow they’d missed it. And of course that would be pretty scary.

Paul said, “No, don’t worry about it” basically in those passages. In verse 3 Christ is not going to come back until two things happen. Any takers on what those two things would be? They’re right there in the passage.

Sig: Unless the rebellion comes first?

Jim: That’s one. What would the rebellion be? What’s another name we often hear for that?

Brave Man: The apostasy.

Jim: The apostasy, yes. That’s the first major thing that had to happen. Now who was Paul talking to when he wrote the letter? He was talking to the Thessalonians. They’re in Greece, they’re in Europe. They are under Roman control. He’s just beginning to bring the gospel to them. How could there be an apostasy, a falling away, unless Rome was converted?

So I believe that implied in that verse there that Paul actually foresaw the conversion of the Roman Empire long before it ever happened, because there had to be faith to fall away from. We’ll talk about it further, but the Roman Empire eventually entirely became converted, and it took upon Europe. And the Middle East took a name for themselves that’s very common, that we sort of forget about. It’s Christendom. You know, it took a long time, but it eventually happened.

“Paul’s Mystery Restrainer”

Well, that’s one. What was the second condition that had to happen before Christ could return? It’s right there in the passage.

Mike: The man of lawlessness is revealed.

Jim: That’s right. Antichrist, the man of lawlessness, needed to be revealed.. And you know, that clarifies so much for people. Think about this. For the folks that say that Jesus could come back at any moment, which you hear all the time, which is so absolutely unbiblical, because in the Scripture here Paul is teaching the church that these two things have to happen first.,

And do you know what that does? It removes a lot of the anxiety people have. It shows that God is truly in control.

Now my next point is that we come to *the restrainer of the lawless one*.

Kirk: Well, Jeff.

Jim: Yes?

Kirk: That would be if you did not believe that there would be a rapture first.

Jim: Well, that’s exactly what he’s talking about in that context. He’s talking about the rapture of the church. Actually, I didn’t intend to get into that. But if you go back and read the passage, that is precisely what he’s talking about. That can’t happen until these things happen. There are other Scriptures besides these, but without opening a big can of worms I believe that’s a key understanding right there in Scripture.

But under Part 3, *the restrainer of the lawless one*, I have to note that antichrist also doesn’t come until two conditions are met. What would those two conditions be? Again, they’re in the passage.

We sort of already talked about the first one. We said that there’s the apostasy and then the coming of antichrist. Well, of course, antichrist can’t come until the apostasy is first. Europe today won’t even recognize their Christian heritage. The place that was once called Christendom, when they were working the last couple years on their U.N. charter, they did not even want to include the fact that they had a Christian heritage, and in part because of the Muslim influence which has become so controversial.

Okay, so that’s one, the apostasy. What’s the second condition? Something has to happen before antichrist can come. It’s there in the passage, verses 6 and 7.

Brave Man: (*Unclear*)

Jim: Well, it says that when he comes he sits in the temple and claims to be God. But something happens before that, the restrainer. Paul says it. He doesn’t identify it. But he tells them in the letter. “I told you who it was when I was with you. That which restrains him and who restrains him is taken out of the way.” The restrainer of antichrist first has to be removed to allow him to come.

Brave Man: The restrainer of the antichrist?

Jim: Of the antichrist, yes. And I would say more largely than that that it would be the restrainer of his religion as well.

Caleb: It’s my understanding that when the church is raptured the presence of the Holy Spirit is gone so Satan is free to do what he wants to do.

Jim: All right. And actually, I was going to ask the question. What do people believe? That’s one of the common teachings, that it’s the rapture of the church that allows that.

“Paul’s Mystery Restrainer”

Now we just read what Paul said about the conditions before Jesus returns. Antichrist has to come first. So how can the church be raptured and be that instrument? I believe the Scripture would make it clear that that’s not possible.

#2. It will be said that the Holy Spirit is removed. Well if the Holy Spirit were removed, how would anybody after that ever get converted?

Brave Man: Right.

Jim: And we know that the Jews come back to Christ. You know, just think through these things; think Biblically about these things.

Another one is that an angel will do it. Well, I think there’s a much better answer. Paul also taught in Romans that it’s the job of government. Romans 13, the first four verses.

Transcriber’s Note: Romans 13:1-4, ESV. *“Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but too bad.”*

Jim: What is one of the purposes of government?

Brave Man: To restrain evil.

Jim: To restrain evil. They’re given the sword to restrain evil. We know the early commentators believed that the restrainer was actually the Roman Empire (what), and the Emperor (who.) It’s a what and a who. And they believed that Paul didn’t mention the name because if he had put it in writing in the Roman Empire, the Christians could have been accused of treason. You know, you’re saying that the Roman Empire and the Roman Emperor were going to be removed. You know, that would not be good.

And so I think there’s another reason too, because it would be easy to misidentify what eventually happens, as we’ll see.

So we come to point 4. And there the title is *Three Great Restrainers*. And I’ll add the word *History’s Three Great Restrainers*. And again we set up the fact that God is at work in history to accomplish His purposes. And how wonderful it is for us as Christians to be looking at history, thinking about what God is up to. How is He fulfilling His plan to complete the Great Commission?

Well, I already mentioned this. I believe Paul foresaw a converted Roman Empire. So if he was talking about the Roman Empire, he wasn’t talking about pagan Rome. He was talking about a converted Roman Empire. And if we look at history, what do we see? What eventually happened? Who became the first converted Roman Emperor?

Sig: Constantine.

Jim: Constantine, yes.

Sig: And didn’t he invoke that it would be the national religion?

Jim: Well, that eventually kind of took place. But he really started it. How many people think negatively and have heard lots of negative things about Constantine in terms of his influence on Christianity?

Brave Man: I have.

“Paul’s Mystery Restrainer”

Jim: Yes, it’s pretty common. And unfortunately, I think it’s really terrible because of how God actually used him and looking at providence through the lens of God’s work, because it’s glorious. What God ended up doing is glorious.

And now I come to the title *The First Great Restrainer*. Does anybody know what Constantine did when he became Emperor? He moved the capital of Rome from Rome to where?

Brave Man: Constantinople.

Jim: Constantinople, right on the boundary of East and West. In the West the last Roman Emperor—and this isn’t dull stuff; this is really God at work here,—the last Roman Emperor was deposed about 476 A.D. You know, the Vandals and whoever they were; I can’t think of the term, but—

Sig: The Barbarians.

Jim: The Barbarians, you got it. They came down, and basically Rome no longer had emperors. And so when we talk about Paul’s prophecy, a lot of people dismissed the prophecy at that point, that it could have been Rome, because did the antichrist come after that? No.

But in the West we tend to entirely overlook what God was doing in the East. The Emperor had moved the capital 150 years before that to the East. And they had emperors on the throne for over 1000 more years. And in fact they had emperors until something happened. Islam conquered Constantinople in 1453. And Constantinople in the Eastern Empire had fought Islam for 800 years!

You know, we’re complaining about what we’re doing in Syria and in Afghanistan, however many years it’s been, you know? Eighteen? Eight hundred years!

And the night that they were taken over they knew it was going to be their last day. The battle went on for 46 days with a cannon that had been imported from Europe, the biggest cannon. It took one hour for each shot. It was so big that they had to re-bore it.

At night the whole city was in the church having a worship service when the walls were broken in. They thought they’d have it till the next day. That night they came in and they slaughtered everybody. The Emperor took off his cloak and he threw himself into the battle.

But they were Christians. But what they did In God’s providence, what Constantinople and the Eastern Empire did is that they bought a thousand years for Europe to get converted. For the gospel to penetrate every single corner of Europe, from Ireland to Russia to Scandinavia to the tip of Italy into the Islands became converted, became Christian. It changed the whole world view of all those places.

Europe became the second great restrainer of antichrist and defeated Islam in three major battles. The first one would have been in France. Would anybody know where it was?

Ted: Tours.

Jim: Tours. The Battle of Poitiers, too, in 732. The Battle of Lepanto, 1571.

Ted: It was a Naval battle.

Jim: A Naval battle in the Mediterranean, more than 50,000 combatants, one of the greatest Naval battles in history. They weren’t expected to win, but they won.

“Paul’s Mystery Restrainer”

Brave Man: Who’s they?

Jim: Europe. The Islamic—

Brave Man: They’re still fighting Islam.

Jim: Well, yes, still for a long time. In act Europe took the name “Christendom” in response to Islamic aggression. That’s where the name came from. Yes?

Matt: The reason that the Christians won at Lepanto is because the wind shifted.

Jim: That is so great, the providence of God. Plus, Europe was in a slightly different place because Europe had also begun to explore the world. They discovered the New World. Europe was being enriched. And I think that was all in the providence of God on multiple levels for the Great Commission.

So Europe then spread the gospel into the New World. You might say that it became the tip of the spear for spreading the gospel. In North America they planted a series of colonies. Those colonies eventually became the United States of America. The United States traces its origin back to Europe, a Christian Europe.

G. K. Chesterton wrote a book called *A Brief History of England* back in the late 1800s. And he said that the Roman Empire never really went away. It only changed. Western civilization traces its roots back to that and to a converted empire, of which the United States is a huge beneficiary.

So the United States becomes the greatest center of missions in the history of the world, the greatest supporter of missions in the history of the world, the greatest protector of missions in the history of the world because of our wealth, because of our power. And when you look at what was going on in the world at the time, from the time of Christ until the United States of America was founded in 1789, it took all that time, 18 centuries for the world’s population to grow from whatever it was, from a hundred some odd million to its first billion. From the time of America’s founding the world’s population went from one billion to more than seven billion. God created the greatest sender of missions. At that time the world’s population was about to explode so that the gospel could reach the most people.

Brave Man: Amen.

Jim: And I said the sender of missions as well. The United States becomes the third, and I say the last, great restrainer. Who remembers the story of how the Marines came into existence, and their famous song, Tripoli? What happened at Tripoli?

Sig: They were ending white slavery from the Barbary pirates. They were enslaving white people.

Jim: That was part of it. It was the Barbary pirates. Jefferson was shocked. He said that they were doing it from a religious impulse. He talked with the ambassador of Tripoli and the others and they said, “Hey, listen! The Quran gives us the right to do that. You people are infidels. We can take your people. We can take your ships. We can do whatever we want to you.”

And they were just taking over American shipping in the Mediterranean. And so they formed the Marines which then bought a hundred years of peace in the Middle East.

“Paul’s Mystery Restrainer”

Do you know the name *leathernecks*? Do you know where that comes from? They wore leather necks so their heads wouldn’t be cut off with the Islamic scimitars. That’s where the name comes from.

I’m sort of implying in this that the religion of antichrist will be Islam. And again in God’s providence you can think about looking at all of history and God at work. All of history will ultimately come down to the spiritual sons, you might say, the spiritual followers of Ishmael on one side and Isaac on the other. And how that exalts what God is doing in the world! What are the odds of that, that after all these centuries and thousands of years of human history that it would come down to the followers of Abraham’s two sons? But God is speaking through those things.

Now besides Tripoli, in World War I the United States went into the war. Who would know what happened as a result of World War I, besides what I already said about Jerusalem? What was the outgrowth? Something came out of it in terms of the effect on Islam.

Matt: That would be the Balfour Declaration.

Jim: Yes, that was a huge thing. There was another thing that happened that affects us even to this day. The *caliphate* was disbanded.

The term “young Turks.” Have you heard that before? Well, it was the young Turks who had been influenced by the West, who decided after 13 centuries that they would disband the *caliphate*. Almost immediately a group rose up in Egypt within, say, four or five years, called the Muslim Brotherhood. Has anybody heard of the Muslim Brotherhood?

Brave Man: Yes.

Jim: Sure. They’re also the parent of Al Qaeda, the parent of ISIS. What is the goal of those organizations? Their goal is to create a *caliphate*, to have a *caliph*. The *caliph* is the guy who is the supreme ruler over all of Islam. There are 57 Islamic states. Each might have its own leader. But the *caliph* would be over all of them. And basically in Islam you technically can’t declare war. You shouldn’t declare war unless you have a *caliph* in place. That’s why ISIS was calling itself *the caliphate*. They wanted to be able to initiate and declare war so they could basically initiate the goal of Islam, which is world domination, so that they can impose *sharia* law over the world in the name of Allah.

So the United States was crucial. If we had not entered that war, Germany very well may have won. Their ally, being Turkey, may still have been in place. But we won the war.

Then we come to World War II. If we hadn’t been drawn into World War II, it’s also very likely that Germany may well have won that war, because then the Jews were set free from the concentration camps.

Rich, you mentioned the formation of Israel in 1948. That wouldn’t have happened without the United States, without Harry Truman and his intervention. The world did not want to offend the Middle East because of oil. But here is God at work in His providence to establish the conditions that would allow for the Second Coming.

Sig: Jim?

Jim: Yes?

“Paul’s Mystery Restrainer”

Sig: The question I have is this. As the Europeans came to America, did they flee Europe because of the conflict with Islam? Were they looking for—

Jim: No. They left Europe because they were being persecuted for their faith.

Sig: Right. But I’m not talking about the Puritans so much as Christopher Columbus. Why did the queen of Spain send him over here?

Jim: That is a wonderful question, Sig, that is a wonderful question. They obviously were looking for a route to the Indies for wealth. But in Christopher Columbus’s own notes he said, *“I believe God was speaking to me through the book of Isaiah to go and explore the Isles. My goal was to find a shortcut to China, to get enough money to retake the Holy Land and build the temple so Christ could come back.”* That was Columbus’s own motivation.

Bill Obaker: Another important fact of history is Luther surviving because the Pope was distracted by Islam at the time.

Jim: I totally forgot to mention that. It was the third battle.

Bill: Luther was saved.

Jim: Yes. That was in fact the third battle. They stopped Islam at the gates of Vienna when all the Reformers believed that Islam would conquer Europe. But the wealth in the New World helped strengthen Europe to a degree. And they defeated the Islamic advance and stopped it until our day, actually, at the gates of Vienna. Does anybody know the date of the battle?

Brave Man: September 11.

Jim: September 11, 9/11.

Sig: Explain that. I didn’t follow you on that.

Jim: The battle started at the gates of Vienna on September 11. They were defeated the next day.

Sig: The battle between who?

Jim: Between Islam attacking Vienna. It’s a great backup here. When Constantinople fell, it opened the back door to Europe. Are there Muslims in the Balkans?

Ted: Yes.

Jim: Of course, yes. They even conquered Greece at one point. And basically they were on their way up. If they had taken Vienna they probably could have gone all the way. But God had another plan and they defeated them. And it bought time for Luther and Calvin’s Reformation to influence the rest of the world including this country, which would not be what it is today without those events.

Sig: But Jim?

Jim: Yes?

Sig: The concern I have, not knowing history as well as you do, is that it’s so interwoven, one incident affecting another. The little I know about American history that doesn’t get talked about is the brutality of people even like Christopher Columbus to the natives he ran into in the Caribbean, or wherever it was.

Jim: Totally true.

“Paul’s Mystery Restrainer”

Sig: Not to forget the Europeans who brutally treated the native Americans, and what we did with black people who were in America, the slaves. And all of this for this manifest destiny.

Jim: No, I’m not saying manifest destiny.

Sig: But that’s what they were—

Jim: They were.

Sig: But how does that all fit in with this conquering of the land?

Jim: Well, because we live in a fallen world, okay. We do. We live in a fallen world. Even Constantinople in the Eastern Empire in Europe played a role.

But think about what God is trying to do. I think it says in Acts 17 that God is the One who establishes the boundaries of the nations, and He sends people where they are for the purpose of the gospel. Yes, they brought a lot of negativity as well. But they also brought the gospel.

And I’ve given a lot of thought even to this issue of slavery. God was building the third great restrainer, all right? We probably would never have achieved that role as quickly as it happened without that. *“God works all things together for good.”* He also exacted a tremendous judgment on the United States for the sin of slavery.

This is a little aside. They estimate that 620,000 slaves were imported into the United States of America directly from Africa, man stealing being a capital offense in the Old Testament. How many people were killed in the Civil War?

Brave Man: About 600,000.

Jim: 620,000. Lincoln said in his second Inaugural that he had come to the conclusion that God was at work bringing justice. He said, “Be patient. Basically the war is not going to end until there is a swipe of the sword for every crack of the whip.”

So if you remember in the Old Testament, God would use Assyria. He used Babylon to come and correct Israel for Israel’s sins. But then He would go and punish them as well.

The same is true in America. I don’t believe we would have risen to the place we are. And what that does is that it actually gives to the slaves who were imported here, they actually played a role in eternal events, which doesn’t take away from what they went through. But God exacted a huge price. That didn’t count all the people who lost their arms and their legs, had no kids, lost their farms, lost everything. *“Vengeance is mine’, says the LORD. ‘I will repay.’”* And He does. Yes?

Caleb: As horrific as slavery was, even in that God was at work because they were delivered from a continent of darkness and Satanic control.

Jim: Yes. That’s true.

Caleb: A lot of these came full circle with their Negro spirituals and their faith in Christ and their hope in the Lord for better times.

Jim: Yes. You know, the human heart is desperately wicked, says the Scripture. And it’s only because of the grace of God that we can change. And that’s what God has been doing. In all of this history He’s been about building a kingdom that will never end. And the United States has played a role in that as the third restrainer.

“Paul’s Mystery Restrainer”

And I go on to say that we then held back Islam in the first Gulf War. We’re now involved in the war on terror, fighting in Afghanistan. And I say this. Stop for a moment and think about what happened on 9/11 from a Biblical perspective. On 9/11 the religion of antichrist attacked the last restrainer of antichrist.

But what Paul says is that antichrist can’t come and won’t come until that which restrains him is taken out of the way. Constantinople fell to Islam.

Part of what opened my eyes to this understanding is when I went to a seminar up at Grove City in 2007 called “The Islamization of Europe,” that which was once Christendom. And they weren’t going to say what I’m saying. But as they were discussing this I thought to myself, *Oh my goodness! This is Paul’s prophecy! 1 Thessalonians 2, verses 3-7. That which restrains the coming of antichrist has been taken out of the way.* And it’s been happening slowly before our eyes and we don’t even see it.

It’s going on in three stages. America is now the third, and I say the last, because Paul says that the restrainer must be removed. Islam attacked America on 9/11 to say, “They stopped us at the gates of Vienna in 1683.” They don’t forget their history. We don’t even pay attention to it. “We’re back. We’re at your gates. This time we intend to win. You’re a paper tiger. You don’t have the staying power. But we do.” Bill?

Bill McCoy: How would you explain the apostle John in his letters to the churches, declaring that there are many antichrists already at work in the world in his day?

Jim: They’re types of the ultimate antichrist, because John also goes on to say in chapter 13 that there will be a ruler that arises. And you’re reminding me to state just one fact, that he will be over and in control of every nation, tongue, tribe and people on earth. That has to include the United States, which is now the superpower of the world. How can we stay the superpower of the world indefinitely for that prophecy to be fulfilled? We can’t.

And we can see the spiritual apostasy going on in our country which has been going on for some time, but is at this point in some quarters becoming almost rabid. It sets the stage for that.

Secondly, I make this point. We talked about what God did in the Civil War in terms of exacting justice. What will He do to a nation that has killed 60 million babies? God says, *“Vengeance is mine; I will repay.”* In other words, I think we can see the justification for the removal. You can see God at work right now in the loss of faith. Apostasy precedes removal. And I think that’s what’s going on right now with the third restrainer.

Brave Man: I love your overall description of the three restrainers.

Jim: Thank you.

Brave Man: To me it still firmly supports that the Holy Spirit covers God’s will being done with these three restrainers.

Jim: Totally true.

Brave Man: This encompasses the whole book of Revelation.

Jim: Yes.

Brave Man: 2 Thessalonians is just a summary, and we can see that the apostasy is coming.

“Paul’s Mystery Restrainer”

Jim: Absolutely.

Brave Man: What will the world be like when there is no Holy Spirit, when there is no church, when there is no light, where people are pretty ready to do whatever? The seven seals are going to be opened, and God will pour His wrath on the churches—

Jim: That is a very common teaching—

Brave Man: I agree with what you’re saying. But it reinforces how I see things. What are your thoughts on that?

Jim: Well again, I come back to the Holy Spirit’s role. The Scripture says, Paul says in Romans chapters 10 and 11 that the Jews will be re-grafted in at the end.

Brave Man: Right.

Jim: We know that no one can be converted without the Holy Spirit.

Brave Man: Right.

Jim: I mean first off, just theologically I don’t see the sense of it. But secondly, just practically, how could the Holy Spirit be removed from planet Earth and any Jew or anybody else thereafter ever get converted? It wouldn’t be possible. Don, yes?

Don: Jim, you have a unique perspective, a very interesting one. I have two questions.

Jim: Yes.

Don: Jesus said, *“This generation will not pass away until all these things are fulfilled.”* I would assume that He was talking to the apostles there. A lot of Matthew 24 talks about the destruction of Jerusalem. How would you explain that? And the question that I also have is that you say that Christ can’t come back until these things happen. Yet Christ always says, “Be ready, be watchful.”

Jim: He does.

Don: Why would that be if we don’t have to worry about the Second Coming until these things happen?

Jim: Well, I’ll just address the second one first. What are we to be watchful for? He had just given a whole series of signs. The disciples had asked Him, *“What will be the sign of Your coming?”* He gave them a whole series from verse 6 all the way to verse 31 of signs. I believe that’s what we’re to look for. He said, *“No man knows the day or the hour.”* “But do you know what? I’ve given you the signs. Pay attention. Look for them.” Don’t be like the Jews who said, “You know, we can understand the weather. But do you know what? We’re clueless when it comes to the time that we’re living in spiritually.”

And then back to the other one. You put your finger on the most important verse of all in dealing with the end times and eschatology, Matthew 24:34.

Transcriber’s Note: Matthew 24:34, ESV. *“Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place.”*

Jim: The disciples had asked Jesus two questions. The first was about the fall of Jerusalem. The second was about His return. I believe Jesus answered both questions fully, thoroughly. He didn’t berate them. And in God’s brilliance it’s like this, you know. The Jews were looking for one coming of Christ. There were two.

In God’s wisdom, when you look carefully at the Scriptures, you see that when Jesus talked about *“this generation”*, this generation has a double meaning. Jerusalem would be destroyed during the lifetime of the generation of the disciples before Him. In fact, it

“Paul’s Mystery Restrainer”

happened in 37 years, within a 40-year generation. This generation,--and I think that even the Greek can support this,--can also speak to this generation that is alive to see these signs and these events of the end. And when you look at the signs that Jesus gave, they seem kind of vague. They were sufficient to alert the Christians about the fall of Jerusalem, and they got out ahead of time. They look awfully vague for the Second Coming.

But when you look at the signs John gives in Revelation,--and John got his information from Jesus, the same One who spoke on Olivet,--it says, *“The revelation of Jesus Christ, which He gave to His angel, who then gave it to John.”* He uses symbolic language to describe many of the very same signs given on Olivet.

So I think what happens there is that all those signs do double duty. They’re repeated. If Jesus had given all that detail the first time it probably would have confused them. So He gives us added information later, like two different witnesses of the same events.

Don: But if these were written to the seven churches, what sense would that have made to them at that time? It was written to the seven churches. Revelation 4-19 would have been for that time, and then 20-22 apply to the end. That’s how I’ve always understood it.

Jim: I think it’s interesting, Don. You bring up the churches. How many churches did He write to?

Don: Seven.

Jim: Seven. What does the number seven generally represent in the Bible?

Brave Man: Perfection. Completion.

Jim: Pardon?

Brave Man: Completion.

Jim: Completion, yes. So I think that part of what God is saying there is that these letters, seven, are complete. They’re enough for all churches, for all believers through the end of time. In other words, we can benefit from them.

Sig: If people need to leave, that’s fine. Preach on, brother. Don’t touch the recording device, though.

Jim: Yes, that’s true. I keep thinking that’s my phone.

Matt: I’m wondering also about the possibility of “this generation,” because remember that in the book of Genesis that the Jewish people had been generated.

Jim: Yes. That’s one of the common teachings. I think what that says wouldn’t be applicable here in the way that Jesus talks about it. The disciples had asked Him a “when” question. That’s where *“this generation”* clearly speaks to when.

A Biblical generation, the most famous generation obviously, was the Exodus generation. It was forty years. The Lord says, “This whole generation is going to die in the wilderness.” I think Jesus is alluding to that, seeing a kind of time frame when He says, *“This generation will not pass away until all these things take place.”*

He’s clearly talking about time. And He’s clearly making an allusion to a 40-year generation, like the Exodus. In fact that generation will be like the exodus to the true Promised Land. You know, the Jews were going to a physical Promised Land. We’re actually looking forward to a city whose Builder and Maker is God, that will never go

“Paul’s Mystery Restrainer”

away. And the setup to that, I believe, is a generation that will be a little less than forty years. Don, did you have more on that?

Don: No, no, this is fine.

Jim: All right. Well, I love talking about this. I just can’t get enough. So thank You, Lord, for this morning. We ask You to be with us. And Lord, I just remember that You define this time, You talk about these events as birth pangs. And I believe that in John’s Gospel You talk about the fact that the mother soon forgets the birth pangs with the birth of her baby, and that these difficulties that we talk about, Lord, You are teaching us to think about them as if they were birth pangs, leading to the birth of a kingdom that will be beyond anything that we can comprehend, and that whatever suffering and difficulties there are, they don’t begin to compare. And so we bless You this day. Thank You for all that You have revealed to us. We praise You for Your great glory. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

Brave Men: Amen. (*Applause*)