The Restrainer

Answering Ten Questions In Order To Interpret 2 Thessalonians 2.6-8a

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> And now you know the *army* restraining *him* until his unveiling in his own time; for the veiled agency of "the *ultimate* lawlessness" is already working, *but* only until[1] the one currently restraining *it* departs from the midst [of Israel]. And then the lawless one will be unveiled …

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[1] In favor of the construction *only until* rather than *only he who …*, see James Hope Moulton and Nigel Turner, *A Grammar of New Testament Greek: Style.* Vol. 4., (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1976–), p. 85. See also, Charles A. Wanamaker, *The Epistles to the Thessalonians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary, (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1990) p. 256.

Colin R. Nicholl reminds us that many have despaired of ever identifying, with any confidence, "the restrainer" (τὸ κατέχον, ὁ κατέχων) that Paul mentioned in 2 Thessalonians 2.6-7.[2] Nevertheless, I share Nicholl's optimism that we can yet produce a biblical answer to the question of the restrainer's identity. Still, to arrive at a settled conclusion about this mysterious entity, we must certainly address a handful of exegetical questions first.[3] Those question are the following:

1. What does the adverb *now* (νῦν) in 2Th 2.6 signify?
2. Why did Paul remind the Thessalonians that *they know* (οἴδατε) the restrainer; what did he mean?
3. What does the conjunction *for* (γὰρ) signify in this context?
4. Why did Paul's refer to the restrainer both in the neuter and masculine genders? As F. F. Bruce wrote, "Anyone undertaking to identify the restraining agency must reckon with the fact that it may be viewed either personally (ὁ κατέχων) or impersonally (τὸ κατέχον)."[4]
5. Why does Paul refer to the *mystery of lawlessness* as a mystery?
6. What is the significance of the definite articles before *lawlessness* (τῆς ἀνομίας) in 2Th 2, verses 3 and 7?
7. Can a more distant antecedent nominative serve as the subject of a verb, when another nominative appears directly before the verb? In other words, in 2Th 2.7, is the nominative participle, *the restrainer*,

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[2] Colin R. Nicholl, *From Hope To Despair In Thessalonica: Situating 1 and 2 Thessalonians*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 225.

[3] My working assumption is that of Pauline authorship, else authorship would have to be included in the questions preliminary to confident exegesis of this passage.

[4] F. F. Bruce, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, Vol. 45, Word Biblical Commentary, (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), p. 171. The mixed genders referring to the same entity seems to be unique in the biblical corpus. It is unusual enough that one 14th c. ms corrected κατεχον in v. 6 to κατεχων as in v. 7, and five 10th c. and later mss corrected κατεχων in v. 7 to κατεχον as in v. 6. It's surprising that more than six scribes over the centuries didn't try to alleviate the discrepancy of genders. See H. Milton Haggard Center for New Testament Textual Studies, *The Center for New Testament Textual Studies: NT Critical Apparatus*, (New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, 2010).

the necessary subject of the verb γένηται, or could the more distant nominative, *the mystery of lawlessness*, be the subject?

8. What is the real force of the middle verb γένηται?

9. Can a chronological locus be established for the events described in these verses, vis-à-vis other chronological markers in the eschatological Scriptures?

10. Where did Paul get his doctrine of a "restraining one" in the first place? Since he was apt to claim that he "stated nothing but what the Prophets and Moses said was going to take place" (Act 26.22; cf. Act 28.23), is there any text in the Jewish Scriptures that speaks of a restrainer that will stop restraining in the End Time?

As to the first question, the NAU [5], along with other versions and commentators, makes the participle *restraining* the referent for the word νῦν (*nēn*)[6], *now*, in v. 6: "what **restrains** him **now**, …" It seems more natural, though, to understand *now* as contrasting with the earlier time "while I was still with you" in v. 5. Having taught the Thessalonians about these things "while I was still with you," the result is that "**now you know**…."[7] In any case, the present participle *restraining* specifies the restraining action as current without need for the adverb *now*. Then again, in v. 7 Paul used a different adverb *now* (ἄρτι) which clearly refers to the restraining action as current and continuing up to the proper time of the unveiling.

Whether the Thessalonians ***now*** *knew*, or *knew the one* ***now*** *restraining*, the fact was that *they knew* (or *knew about*) the restraining one. That Paul used the inherently stative verb οἶδα (*ēda*, perfect translated as a present) to remind them of this, implies that the Thessalonians' understanding of the restrainer involved a settled knowledge based upon having seen or experienced something. If we had no context for 2Th 2.6, we

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[5] The New American Standard Bible, © 1995 by the Lockman Foundation. Unless otherwise stated, Bible quotations are taken from this version.

[6] My phonetic transliterations of Greek words are given according to Modern Greek pronunciation, with *ch* representing the guttural K sound as in *Bach*.

[7] KJV, cf. NET.
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might guess that the Thessalonians knew what they did about the restrainer because they had directly or indirectly experienced the restraining entity. However, οἴδατε (ēdätĕ), *you know,* was a favorite epistolary phrase of Paul's (1Th 1.5; 2.1-2,5,11; 3.3-4; 4.2; 5.2; 2Th 3.7). The phrase did not refer to the Thessalonians' acquaintance with some contemporary person or power in their region, but to their memory of what Paul had previously taught them. Paul had given or shown them authoritative information about the restraining entity (more on this point in my conclusion below).

Nicholl helps us appreciate the significance of the conjunction γὰρ (gär), *for*, as the hinge between 2Th 2.6 and its clarification in v. 7:

> The emphatically positioned τὸ μυστήριον [the mystery] in verse 7 stands in contrast to ἀποκαλυφθῆναι [to be revealed], **indicating that this verse functions to explain** (γὰρ) **the preceding clause**. Until the ἄνομος [lawless man] is revealed at a definite time in the future, ἀνομία [lawlessness] is at work (ἐνεργεῖται) as a 'mystery', that is, in an 'unrevealed' state.[8]

So, the Thessalonians understood that, at the time of Paul's writing to them, the *mystery of lawlessness* and *the restraining entity* were both currently at work, but that "the restrainer has not yet been removed, therefore the man of lawlessness has not yet appeared, and *a fortiori* the Day of the Lord has not yet arrived."[9] This places verses 6-8a squarely within the logical development of Paul's larger argument of 2Th 2, by which he urged the Thessalonians not to be deceived by some nonsense about the day of the Lord having already

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8   Colin R. Nicholl, *From Hope To Despair In Thessalonica: Situating 1 and 2 Thessalonians*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 226, emphasis added. See also James Moffat, "The First and Second Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Thessalonians," in *The Expositor's Greek Testament: Commentary*, Vol. 4., (New York: George H. Doran Company), p. 49: "The κατέχων is a fact of present experience and observation, which accounts for the ἀνομία being as yet a μυστήριον, operating secretly, and not an ἀποκάλυψις."

9   F. F. Bruce, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, Vol. 45, Word Biblical Commentary, (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), p. 171.

arrived. With that understanding of its larger context, we may return to the analysis of Paul's secondary point about the restrainer.

As we have already noted, Paul referred to the restrainer using two different genders: **neuter** in v. 6, and **masculine** in v. 7. This grammatical phenomenon is unique, found nowhere else in the canonical Scriptures. There are other passages in which two participles appear, both from the same lemma, but with differing genders (as in Rom 2.14 and a handful of others), but the participles are always purely adjectival, and change their genders in order to agree grammatically with the nouns or pronouns which they describe. In contrast, the two participles in 2Th 2.6-7, though inherently adjectival like all participles, act as substantives. The do not describe other substantives in the context, and so there is no contextual reason why the second participle should switch genders.

Why then do the genders of the participles differ? For some very good reasons it turns out! In v. 6 Paul began with the **neuter** singular articular participle, τὸ κατέχον (*tŏ katĕchōn*), translated *what restrains* or *what is restraining*, first of all in order to differentiate the restrainer (neuter), in the first half of this verse, from *him who will be unveiled* (masculine), described in the second half of the verse. To make sense of this passage, we must understand that the *restrainer* and *the one to be eventually unveiled* are two distinct entities; Paul does *not* describe a single entity that is restraining itself.[10] As to whom is being restrained, it is clearly the "him" that Paul has been speaking of, namely, the one who will subsequently be unveiled (vv. 3 & 6), i.e. the man of lawlessness, the Antichrist. Since it is the Antichrist who is being restrained, we can tentatively conclude that the restrainer is either God or some agent under God's sovereign direction or control; we will narrow down the possibilities shortly. The second reason for the neuter gender of the participle in 2Th 2.6 is that "the neuter Singular [sic] of adjectives and

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[10] The active participle also militates against the idea of the restrainer and the restrained being the same entity. Paul had the grammatical means, using a middle verb and/or the reflexive pronoun, to describe the restrainer as "the one restraining himself," had he intended to do so.

participles … is employed to set forth a plurality of concrete objects in their union."[11] In other words, in his first reference to the restrainer, Paul spoke of it as an *impersonal* entity, probably because he was thinking of the restrainer as a *corporate agency* of some kind.

Then, in v. 7, Paul again refers the restrainer, but as ὁ κατέχων (ō *katĕchōn*, **masculine** singular). As we read this second articular participle, we realize that the restrainer is more than an impersonal agency. The restrainer is more than an *it*; we can refer to the restrainer as a *he*. Whether man or spirit, the restrainer is personal and has a masculine quality.

How can the restrainer be both neuter and impersonal *and* masculine and personal? Very easily. Imagine reading a headline that said, "Breaking News: The President Retaliating Immediately Against The Terrorist Enclave In Eastern Syria." As you read this headline, you would understand that the president himself is nowhere near the terrorist enclave, but that an armed force is carrying out the mission *under his command*. Our use of metonymy,[12] in this case referring to an unspecified armed force by the title of our nation's commander-in-chief, allows us to use the word *president* in an **impersonal** way that nevertheless conveys information about his personal involvement at some level. A follow-up headline might say, "Our Militant President Addresses The Nation To Explain His Lightning Strike." We would understand that this second statement refers to the president **personally**. This helps us understand that the two genders of the restrainer in 2Th 2 .6-7 point to him as **a personal entity with agents under his command**.[13] This, together with the fact that the restrainer is holding back something

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[11]   Alexander Buttmann, *A Grammar of the New Testament Greek*, (Andover: Warren F. Draper, 1891), pp. 122-123.

[12]   A figure of speech which biblical authors used as we do, by which we designate something by the name of something associated with it.

[13]   Nicholl prefers to understand the neuter participle as focusing on the restraining activity while the masculine refers to the restrainer as a person. Colin R. Nicholl, *From Hope To Despair In Thessalonica: Situating 1 and 2 Thessalonians*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 247-248.

nefarious, narrows down his identity to God, or an archangel (with angelic soldiers under his command).[14]

Before we further narrow down the possible identities of the restrainer, let us analyze the "mystery of lawlessness." Generally for Paul, a mystery was a truth or phenomenon, once hidden or only partially understood, but now fully revealed and ready for proclamation (Rom 16.25-26; Eph 6.19; Col 1.26; 4.3). However, Paul knew that some mysteries, while destined for full disclosure, had not yet been fully revealed to all, or fully revealed *at all*. One such mystery was the "partial hardening" of Israel, a phenomenon which many Christians understood, but which some *misunderstood*, and about which many Jews remained completely blind (Rom 11.25). Similarly, the "mystery of lawlessness" was a phenomenon whose workings could be observed, but whose full manifestation had not yet come. Thus, it would have been confusing for Paul to have spoken simply of "lawlessness already working," for then the Thessalonians would have understood him as referring to the normal and ubiquitous ungodliness always manifest in human society. Instead, he drew their attention to the "**mystery** of lawlessness already working," a hidden impetus *behind* a certain observable antipathy toward God's laws (and God's people) in their world. It becomes clear in the context of 2Th 2, therefore, that "the mystery of lawlessness" was precisely that hidden power or agency that would eventually energize "the man of lawlessness."[15]

Again, this hidden power or agency did not particularly have to do with the general lawlessness that could be attributed to fallen man's vitiated nature alone. Instead, as the man of lawlessness will be the man of *the*

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[14] A mortal ruler or commander is ruled out, for those of us who are futurists, because the entity that was restraining in Paul's day is still restraining almost 2,000 years later.

[15] "This mystery of ἀνομία is … all that mass of uncombined, and so to say, unorganized ἀνομία, which, though at present seen only in detail and not *revealed* in its true proportions, is even now (ἤδη) aggregating and energizing, and will hereafter (ἐν τῷ ἑαυτοῦ καιρῷ) find its complete development and organization in the person and power of Antichrist." Charles J. Ellicott, *A Critical and Grammatical Commentary on St. Paul's Epistles to the Thessalonians: With a Revised Translation*, (London: John W. Parker & Son, 1858), p. 108.

lawlessness, so is the mystery of lawlessness the mystery of **the** lawlessness. Paul did not have general lawlessness in view, but the apocalyptic lawlessness of that demonic agency that will "try to change the set times and the laws" in the End Time (Dan 7.25). Paul uses definite articles *par excellence* to point his readers to that ultimate antipathy toward God and His laws that will be fully revealed in the supreme expression of human autonomy, the Antichrist.

Now, as we seek to understand the word γένηται (*yĕnētĕ*), the final and most puzzling verb of 2Th 2.7, we should first observe that the words *taken* and *way* do not appear in the Grk text of this verse. The word *taken* is an interpretive addition made by very early translators (certainly by the time of the Geneva Bible of 1599, and possibly going back to the Vulgate), and copied by more recent versions. The word *way* does have a Grk counterpart in the GNT, but it is a poor translation of the word μέσου (*mĕsou*), which means *midst, middle* or *between*. Whichever way we interpret γένηται, it has to do with someone or something proceeding *from out of the midst* or *middle* of something else. We cannot hope to understand what this is about, though, until we identify the subject of γένηται; who or what is doing the action?

Among the many who have attempted to interpret this passage over the centuries, a minority (including myself for many years) have identified the first nominative of v. 7, *the mystery*, as the subject doing the action expressed in the verb γένηται. Jay P. Green was among this minority. In his *Literal Translation Bible (KJ3)[16]* he rendered 2Th 2.7,

> For the mystery of lawlessness already is working, only he is holding
> back now, until it comes out of the midst.

Notice the neuter *it* in the final clause of Green's translation: *it comes out of the midst.* Having chosen the neuter *mystery of lawlessness* as the subject of the final verb, Green's translation pictures that *mystery* as emerging from the midst (of something), presumably in the person of the man of lawlessness. For many years I preferred this interpretation over the twentieth-century

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[16]   Published in 1985 by Jay Patrick Green, Sr.

suggestions that the restrainer, identified as the Holy Spirit inhabiting the Church, was the subject of the verb and would be **taken** out of the world in the rapture. I preferred to see the *mystery of lawlessness* as the subject of the verb γένηται because the dispensational "rapture interpretation" was untenable both exegetically and theologically.

However, F. F. Bruce, a biblical scholar whose opinions are not to be ignored, wrote in connection with 2Th 2.7, "The subject of γένηται cannot be other than ὁ κατέχων [i.e., *the restrainer*, not *the mystery*]."[17] Sadly, Bruce did not elaborate on why this must be so.[18] Nevertheless, after executing grammatical searches by computer, I have proven to myself that throughout the Greek scriptures:

> When a nominative articular noun is followed by its verb, and then
> followed by a nominative articular participle, the participle either acts
> as an adjective in an attributive position vis-à-vis the preceding noun
> (e.g. Rev 17.18), or acts as a substantive and has its own verb (e.g. Joh
> 8.12; Gal 3.12).

The implication is that ὁ κατέχων in 2Th 2.7 either expresses an attribute of τὸ μυστήριον (which is impossible because of conflicting genders), or ὁ κατέχων must have its own verb, and is therefore the subject of γένηται, as is generally assumed.[19]

So, the restrainer is the subject of the verb γένηται, but now we must decide what exactly γένηται means! In connection with this passage, many commentaries have mentioned the well known, fundamental meaning of the

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[17] F. F. Bruce, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, Vol. 45, Word Biblical Commentary, (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), p. 171.

[18] Henry Alford, writing in 1874, effectively anticipated Bruce by denying that the participle κατέχων required us to supply any other verb than what was already in the text, namely, γένηται. Henry Alford, *Alford's Greek Testament: An Exegetical and Critical Commentary*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Guardian Press, 1976), vol. 3, p. 291.

[19] Alford was correct to say that, "Various erroneous arrangements *and* renderings of this sentence [in 2Th 2.7] … have arisen from fancying that the participle κατέχων requires some verb to be supplied after it." Ibid. Indeed, in our standard Eng editions, the NAU has supplied, *will do so*, the NIVO, *will continue to do so*, and even the KJV, *will let*, but none of these additions are necessary.

word γίνομαι: *to become, be born* or simply *to happen*. Very few, however, have offered an analysis of the form of the verb in this context, which is **aorist subjunctive**, and in the **middle voice**. The aorist subjunctive is demanded in this clause by the use of the conjunction, ἕως (ĕōs), *until*. Paul envisioned "a point in the future at which a new situation is inaugurated or an existing situation is brought to an end."[20] We often translate the subjunctive with the helping word *may*, because the subjunctive expresses an action as not yet having occurred. However, the subjunctive does not inherently express uncertainty that the action *will occur*, only ambiguity regarding the time or circumstances of its occurrence. The aorist subjunctive is used in Luk 24.49, for example, in which verse Jesus says, "stay in the city **until you are clothed with power from on high** (ἕως οὗ ἐνδύσησθε ἐξ ὕψους δύναμιν)." The event would definitely occur, but the disciples to whom Jesus spoke would not know ahead of time the precise moment or geographical location of its occurrence. Likewise, Paul indicated to the Thessalonians that something would definitely occur in the future, vis-à-vis the restrainer and the mystery of lawlessness, and that this event would bring the existing situation, i.e., the agency of lawlessness operating as a mystery, to an end. What is key, and constantly overlooked, is that the aorist subjunctive verb is in the **middle voice**. This oversight has resulted in 2Th 2.7 being almost always translated as though γένηται were passive, and therefore, as if the restrainer, ὁ κατέχων, is passively acted upon by some other agency, and "taken out."[21] However, there is such a close relationship between the active and middle voice in Grk, that Friedrich Blass wrote, "As the active is used in place of the middle, so the **middle** often stands **for** the **active** which would naturally be expected," and he cited 2Th 2.7 as an example.[22] In other words, we can translate the middle verb as though it were

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[20]   Constantine R. Campbell, *Basics of Verbal Aspect in Biblical Greek*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008), p. 92.

[21]   In the NT there is a different family of Greek words, the αἴρω family, that is consistently used to mean *taken* (see 1Co 5.2).

[22]   Friedrich Blass, *Grammar Of New Testament Greek*, Translated by Henry St. John Thackeray, (London: Macmillan and Co., Limited, 1911), p. 185.

a simple active, but we have not authority to translate a middle verb as a simple passive! Thus, the middle voice of γένηται tells us that, instead of being passively brought into being or taken out of something, the restrainer is wholly involved in the action that occurs.
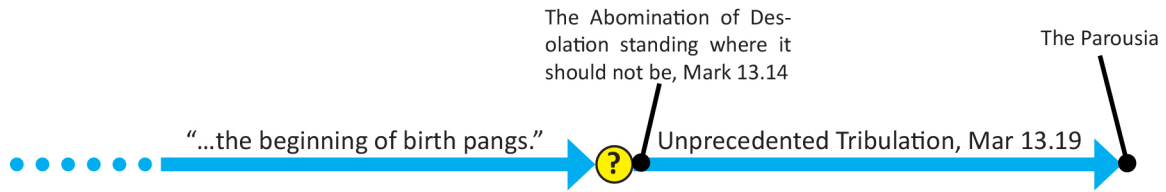
That action is modified by the prepositional phrase ἐκ μέσου (*ĕk mĕsou*, *out of the midst*, *out of the middle*, or *out from between*). The phrase occurs five other times in the NT and some 87 times in the LXX. It always refers to some person(s) or thing **moving out from** within a particular environment, situation or group. When this prepositional phrase is used, the nature of **the moving out** is defined by an accompanying verb, such as *exclude, proceed, snatch, remove, exit,* etc. Since in 2Th 2.7 the defining verb is γένηται, with ὁ κατέχων as the subject, we understand that the restrainer, ὁ κατέχων, is actively involved in motion out from the midst of something or out from between some things.

This event is so mysterious that it will help us if we can place it on a timeline relative to other End Time chronological markers. Let's take the series of events connected with the Lawless One in 2Th 2 and express them graphically with this simple time line:
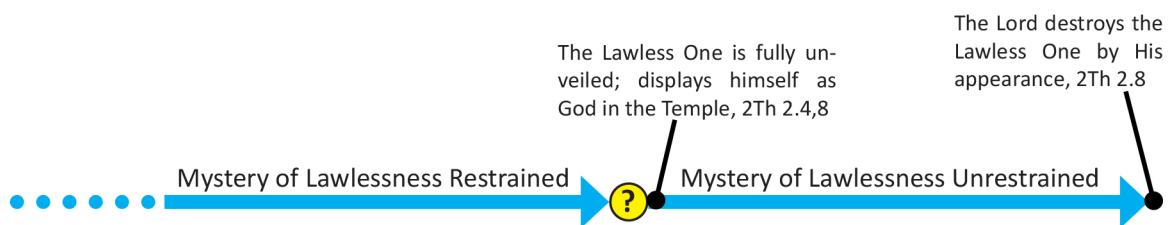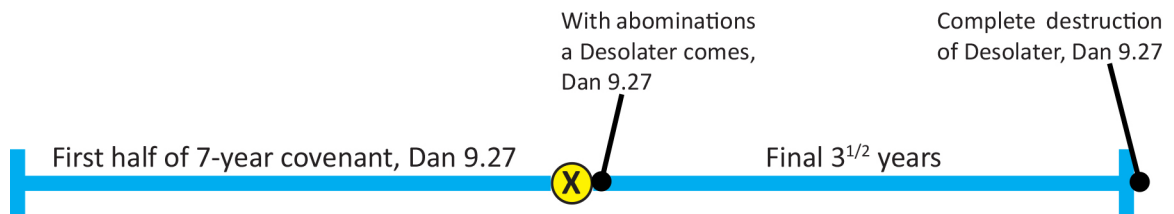

Paul describes his present time in which the Mystery of Lawlessness is restrained, but only until **the event (?) of 2Th 2.7 occurs**. Immediately after that event, "the Lawless One will be revealed" (2Th 2.8), displaying himself as God in the temple during a period of *unrestrained* lawlessness (2Th 2.4), but only until he is utterly destroyed by the Lord's coming (2Th 2.8).

This timeline looks very much like the one we can make for the pivotal events of Mark 13:

The Abomination of Desolation standing where it should not be, Mark 13.14

The Parousia

"...the beginning of birth pangs."

Unprecedented Tribulation, Mar 13.19

In the Olivet Discourse, Jesus did not mention a restrainer, nor the event (?) that would end the restraint, but He did speak of the Abomination of Desolation standing in the Holy Place of the Temple, a phenomenon that would seem to correlate somehow with the acts of the Lawless One described in 2Th 2. As with the manifestation of the Lawless One in 2Th 2, the appearance of the Abomination of Desolation in Mar 13 occurs at the moment when one state of circumstances ends and another one begins. Then both scenarios conclude with the Lord's coming. If this is a correct correlation between the two teachings, then the event described as ὁ κατέχων ... ἐκ μέσου γένηται, in 2Th 2.7, will occur just before the appearance of the Abomination of Desolation and the onset of unprecedented tribulation for Israel and the Middle East.
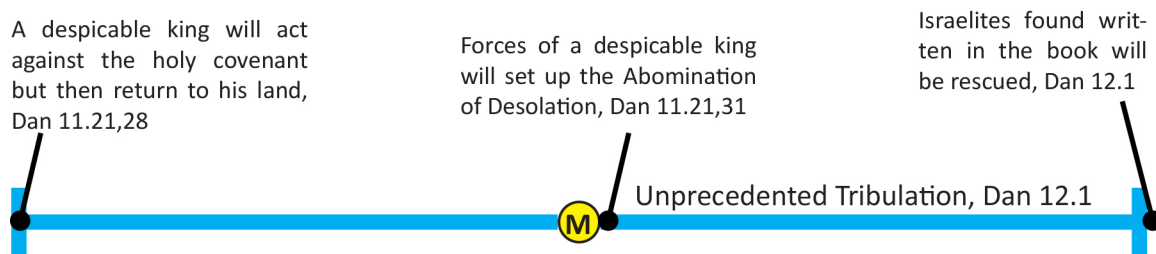
These timelines both have a parallel in the sequence of events described in Dan 9, in connection with Daniel's prophetic 70th week:

With abominations a Desolater comes, Dan 9.27

Complete destruction of Desolater, Dan 9.27

First half of 7-year covenant, Dan 9.27

Final 3$^{1/2}$ years

The sequence in Dan 9 also has a pivotal event (X), immediately after which a Desolater comes with abominations. Those events are then followed by a period of time which concludes with the complete destruction of the

Desolater. In this scenario, however, **the pivotal event (X)** is specified: "in the middle of the week he *will* put a stop to sacrifice and grain offering …" (Dan 9.27). In other words, **the pivotal event (X)**, in this passage, is the breaking of the covenant which "the prince who is to come" (Dan 9.26) ratified with "the many" (Dan 9.27; "the many" presumably including the nation of Israel). If this prophecy indeed correlates with the other two above, then we can say that the event Paul described as ὁ κατέχων ... ἐκ μέσου γένηται, in 2Th 2.7, will occur at nearly the same moment as Antichrist violates the covenant with Israel.

Much greater detail for the Dan 9.27 sequence is provided at the end of Daniel's prophecies. There we find this sequence of events:

A despicable king will act against the holy covenant but then return to his land, Dan 11.21,28

Forces of a despicable king will set up the Abomination of Desolation, Dan 11.21,31

Israelites found written in the book will be rescued, Dan 12.1

Unprecedented Tribulation, Dan 12.1

For this timeline, I interpret the action taken by the despicable king in Dan 11.28 as referring to the ratification of the covenant (Dan 9.27), done duplicitously at the beginning of the 7-year period of Daniel's 70th week (Dan 9.24-27). Again we have **a pivotal event (M)**, immediately after which the setting up of the Abomination of Desolation occurs, followed by a period of unprecedented tribulation, a period which culminates in the complete deliverance of the elect (Dan 12.1; cf. Mar 13.24-27). Most importantly for our present study, this final sequence also specifies its **pivotal event (M)** in Dan 12.1 (given here in the NKJV, with emphasis added):

> At that time Michael shall **stand** up,
> The great prince who **stands** *watch* over the sons of your people….

Sadly, this verse has been translated correctly but rather nonsensically in all of our standard versions. The problem is that a verb is used twice in this verse, but *each time with a different meaning*, and translations have done poorly in differentiating the senses. The verb is the Heb עָמַד, (*ämäd*), which means *to stand*, but which can express "standing" in many different ways. The second occurrence of the verb in Dan 12.1 (the first occurrence translated in the Eng), is the articular participle, הָעֹמֵד (*hä-ōmäd*), "*the one standing* over the sons of your people...." In this instance, *standing* has the sense *standing guard, protecting*. However, the main verb of the sentence is the imperfect יַעֲמֹד (*yäəmōd*), *he will stand*. The question is, in what sense will Michael, who is already *standing guard* over Israel, *stand* in such a way that unprecedented distress for Israel will immediately ensue (Dan 12.1b)?

The question is easily answered, because the verb עָמַד can mean *stand* in the military sense of *stand down*, i.e., *stand still, cease*. In other words, a moment will come when Michael will be ordered to stand down, and stop protecting Israel.[23] Here at last we have **a specified event** that seems to match the pivotal event mentioned by Paul, an event that will allow the floodgate of lawlessness to open. It's an event that will occur immediately prior to the unprecedented tribulation (Dan 12.1), an event almost simultaneous with the appearance of the Abomination of Desolation (Mar 13.14-19), and so presumably an event immediately preceding the full unveiling of the Lawless One (2Th 2.8). The event in view is the *standing down* of the archangel Michael, the temporary cessation of his protection over Israel.

Is then Michael the archangel the restrainer of 2Th 2? Well, this identification can explain the neuter *and* masculine genders that Paul used in reference to the restrainer. We can conclude that in his first reference to τὸ κατέχον in 2Th 2.6, Paul used the neuter gender in order to allude by

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[23]   This is shocking, terrifying news, but wholly in line with God's deep plan for the Jewish nation. His End-Time agenda is for the power (lit. *the hand*) of the Holy People to be shattered (Dan 12.7), for it is only when their self-reliance is finally broken, that they can be brought to full repentance and faith as a nation (cf. Zec 12.10 to 13.2).

metonymy to Michael as a soldier or as a military force (perhaps with the neuter στράτευμα in mind). This would be entirely appropriate since Michael is a commander of the first order (Dan 10.13), with his own dragon-fighting angels under his command (Rev 12.7). Then Paul used the masculine ὁ κατέχων, in 2Th 2.7, because Michael is also the personal individual who will receive the command to "stand down" (Dan 12.1).

However, can we equate Michael's "standing down" militarily (Dan 12.1) with ὁ κατέχων ... ἐκ μέσου γένηται, "the one restraining ... out of the midst/middle becomes"? I believe, Yes, because however we translate the clause in 2Th 2.7b, it clearly describes a cessation of restraint upon the Mystery of Lawlessness. Dan 12.1 and 2Th 2.7 describe the same event from differing perspectives: on the one hand Israel's protection is lifted, on the other hand Israel's archenemy is no longer restrained.

Still, we must see if we can translate ὁ κατέχων ... ἐκ μέσου γένηται in a manner consistent with this thesis. Since the verb γίνομαι (*yēnōmĕ*) expresses the idea of *becoming*, i.e., transitioning from one state into another, how we translate this verb depends upon the contextual perspective: the subject may be transitioning *into/toward* something or *out of/away from* something. The prepositional phrase ἐκ μέσου in 2Th 2.7, tells us that the restrainer is moving *out of/away from* something.[24] Thus, we can make a comparison with the use of γίνομαι in Dan 2.1b (LXX), in which text the final subject is Nebuchadnezzar's sleep (ὁ ὕπνος αὐτοῦ) and the predicate states that it "departed from him" (ἐγένετο ἀπ' αὐτοῦ). As in 2Th 2.7b, we have a prepositional phrase in Dan 2.1b telling us that Nebuchadnezzar's sleep was moving *out of/away from* something, namely from himself! With complete assurance, then, we can translate ὁ κατέχων ... ἐκ μέσου γένηται with, "the restraining one ... departs from the midst."[25]

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[24]   Cf. the use of ἐκ μέσου in Act 17.33.

[25]   The LXX of Dan 12.1 has Michael becoming "no longer available" or "disappearing" (παρέρχομαι in BDAG), contrary to the Theodotian revision of the LXX (ἀναστήσεται = *stand up*, *raise up*) followed in the Eng translation by Brenton.

This of course raises the question, "the midst" of what? If Paul's teaching in 2Th 2 is as dependent upon the book of Daniel as it appears to be[26], then the answer to this question must be *Israel*: the restrainer departs from the midst of Israel, leaving the nation vulnerable to Lawless One.[27] It is possible, since the context of 2Th 2 refers to the Temple, that the restrainer was thought to depart specifically from *the midst* of Temple, or from *the midst* Jerusalem (cf. Jer 6.1 LXX), or *the midst* Judea (cf. Mar 13.14). However, without specific phrasing giving the restrainer's specific point of departure, we best keep our interpretation general: Michael (with his angelic army) departs from his protective stand in the midst of Israel.

In conclusion, the explanation of 2Th 2.6-8a I have given above, along with the translation I have offered at the beginning of this little treatise, gives weight to Paul's statement to the Thessalonian Christians, "And now **you know** the *army* restraining …." The Thessalonians could know this matter confidently because it was *not* a novelty taught by Paul, *nor* was it based on some other Christian's personal revelation. Once again, Paul taught "nothing but what the Prophets and Moses said was going to take place" (Act 26.22; cf. Act 28.23). The Thessalonians could base their knowledge of the restrainer on the sure word of Scripture (cf. 2Pe 1.19), because that is the source from which Paul taught them about this important figure.

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[26] As Nicholl writes, "Given that Daniel was the primary source of the concept of an eschatological antagonist in early Christianity, any investigation into the identity of the restrainer of the antagonist's 'revelation' or 'parousia' should begin there. That the author of 2 Thessalonians is dependent on Daniel in his portrayal of the man of lawlessness is indicated by his allusion to Dan. 11:36-7 in 2 Thess. 2:4a and by his reference to a final, literal desecration of the Jerusalem temple in 2 Thess. 2:4b, which is rooted in Daniel's prophecies (Dan. 9:27; 12:11; cf. 8:13; 11:31)." Colin R. Nicholl, *From Hope To Despair In Thessalonica: Situating 1 and 2 Thessalonians*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 225.

[27] It is possible, since the context of 2Th 2 refers to the Temple, that Jerusalem is in view (cf. Jer 6.1 LXX), or Judea (Mar 13.14)