

Who (or What) Is the Restrainer?

Second Thessalonians 2:6–7 indicates that the “lawless one” is currently being restrained by someone or something that eventually will be removed. The Thessalonians knew who or what this restrainer was (2:5–6). Interpreters since then have had to guess:

- God or God's power
- the Holy Spirit
- Satan
- the angel Apollyon (Rev. 9:11)
- the archangel Michael (Jude 1:9; Rev. 12:7)
- the Christian church
- some prominent Christian leader (Paul himself or James of Jerusalem)
- the gentile mission, which had to be completed first (cf. Mark 13:10)
- the Roman Empire and/or the emperor (cf. Rom. 13:1–7)

Such ideas are sometimes combined: 2:6 seems to speak of a restraining force (“what is now restraining him”), while 2:7 seems to speak of a person (“the one who now restrains”).

In the fifth century, Augustine's comment on 2:6–7 was, “I must admit that the meaning of this completely escapes me” (*The City of God* 20.19). Modern scholars have fared no better than Augustine in their analysis of this puzzle.