

**Question:** I need your help. 2 Thess 2:11 . . . I've seen it before and just glossed over it, but I'm stuck on it this time. The verbiage seems to indicate more than God simply turning them over to their sin and allowing them to be deceived. It reads as if He actually took part in the deception. I pulled up an Interlinear Bible to see if the word "send" was simply a poor translation, but that doesn't seem to be the case. I know God is always good, fair, and just, so I was hoping you could help me reconcile His character and His actions here.

**Answer:** In 2 Thess 2:11 God does indeed "send" (*pempo*) a deluding influence. However, it is important to note that He only does so *in response to* unbelievers following the false signs and wonders of the Antichrist (2:9), refusing to love the truth (2:11) and delighting in wickedness (2:12). God does not cause people to believe "the lie," or to follow delusions. They have already proved themselves contrary to righteousness and open to evil. These people have repeatedly embraced wickedness so that their character is formed by evil. Although God's action may seem perplexing and even troubling, it is similar to Paul's statements elsewhere that God gives sinners over to their own sin (Rom 1:24, 26, 28; 11:8; cf. 2 Tim 4:4). In each of these passages, God's actions are a response to, not the cause of, their actions.

God giving people over to their sinful choices and actions is not unique to the New Testament. This same interplay is also seen in such episodes at the hardening of Pharaoh's heart, which is both Pharaoh's action (Exod 8:15, 32; 9:34; cf. 1 Sam 6:6) and God's action (Exod 4:21; 7:3; 9:12; 10:1, 20, 27; 11:10; 14:4, 8); the evil spirit which troubles Saul, sent by God as a judgment on Saul's disobedience (1 Sam 16:14; 18:10; 19:9; cf. 15:11; 16:1); and certain OT texts where God employs evil spirits to inspire false prophets and so carry out His just judgment against the wicked (2 Sam 24:1 with 1 Chron 21:1; 1 Kgs 22:18–23; Ezek 14:9). God's *modus operandi* is particularly clear in Ps 81:11–13: "But My people did not listen to My voice, and Israel did not obey Me. So I gave them over to the stubbornness of their heart, to walk in their own devices. Oh that My people would listen to Me, that Israel would walk in My ways!"

In all of these examples, God is not the author of deception, but He allows those who reject the truth to be misled by falsehood. God sends that which leads to hardening, deception and sin, but in each case He sends it only in response to the rejection of His message which the person has already chosen. In effect, God gives to those who reject Him a greater measure of that which they have chosen for themselves, demonstrating the consequences of the choice which they have made. Hence, God's just character and rule over the world is preserved along with human responsibility.