

# A message to Thessalonica

Examining Paul's end-time message  
to the Thessalonian Church.

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ISBN-

## DEDICATION

To those not afraid to question the scholars,  
and simply believe the Lord.

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## INTRODUCTION

So who is the antichrist?

Or... When will Jesus come, before or after the coming tribulation?

Or... Will Jesus keep *all* His promises to the Jewish people regarding a kingdom?

Or... Who is *the restrainer* mentioned by Paul?

Questions, questions... some of which I will attempt to answer in this book. As end-time questions have come into my thinking over the years, I have attempted to find answers in the Scriptures, and pass them along to the people of God via audio and written works.

Now, there are over-arching questions that obtain generalized answers. Is Jesus coming back? That's clear. That's easy. But many believers stop there and assume that that's all we should consider necessary.

And it is. All that's *necessary*. But shouldn't the entire set of Biblical mysteries intrigue God's children, to the point where they delight in digging further? We see them loving mysteries in books and movies. We see them finding every *imaginable* fact about their sports heroes. And then they tell us that the *minutia* of Scripture is not all that important.

But why shouldn't all the Bible fascinate us, and invite us to search its depths?

Examine with me the eschatological (last things) words of Paul to the Thessalonian church. Mysteries are unfolded here. A veritable mine of intrigue for the treasure-hunter.

As much as possible, can we lay aside what we have heard in the media, the books, even many of the pulpits? Some of it is pure gold, to be sure. Other findings of the voices out there are but crumbling dust on the outside of the mine.

Light your candles. Let's go in. Riches are ahead if we dig deep enough.

## Setting the stage

### Paul.

Though the apostle named Paul was not with Jesus during His years in Judea, Galilee, and the surrounding areas, he was adequately trained after his miraculous calling, which is recorded in the eighth chapter of Acts.

It is believed that Paul was alone with Jesus in the Nabatean region of Arabia, per Galatians 1:17, for three years. After this introduction to Christ and His teachings, he was in fellowship with Peter and the other apostles. His calling was as real as theirs, his mission was as specific.

But his revelations surpassed the other apostles, in kind and in volume. For example, Paul connected with Daniel before him and John after him – in their writings – plus the Spirit in him, so that he formed a theology of the end times as full as both of those men, and fuller in many respects.

He was not a light-weight in his *eschatology*. That word, by the way, is from the Greek *eschatos* which simply means “final.” The final episodes of the planet as we know it now, are spelled out in much of the New Testament.

Paul’s words to the Thessalonian church of first century Macedonia, and in fact to *all the holy brethren* (1 Thessalonians 5:27) weave together all the basics of the second coming of Jesus Christ.

These two letters, carefully read, spell the end of the *theories* of the return of our Lord, and replace them with rock-solid undeniable facts. Oh that God’s people would simply sit and read these words and believe them *just as they are*.

### **The Thessalonian Church.**

The history of the Thessalonian church begins in Acts 16, where is recorded the specific leading of the apostolic team headed by Paul, to come over into Macedonia, the region directly north of modern Greece. This was new territory. Well, everywhere Paul went was new territory. All the Gentiles were now being called to the Gospel!

There follows in the narrative, a series of visits to Macedonian towns where the Gospel is preached and the church is established: Philippi is first (Acts 16:12). Thessalonica is next (Acts 17:1).

For three weeks, Paul preaches the Scriptures and Jesus in a Jewish synagogue in that city. Many Jews, and even more Greeks, of Thessalonica, come to the Lord.

However, some envious Jews cause a negative reaction to the Christian ministers. A brother named Jason, who is keeping them in his home, is assaulted and threatened, and forced to send Paul and Silas to the next town, Berea. But some of the Jews of that place follow Paul to Berea, and once more he is pushed to another place, Athens. And so goes this journey.

The other historical mentions of this Thessalonian church are in Acts 20:4 and 27:1. There we learn that two converts from the church travel with Paul, namely Aristarchus and Secundus.

This Aristarchus is Paul's traveling companion on that last fateful journey of his to Rome. Two of Paul's letters mention him as well: Philemon, and the letter to the Colossians, sent from a Roman prison. In that epistle, this same brother Aristarchus is called Paul's *fellow-prisoner*.

It is no wonder that Paul has such warm feelings for the church in Thessalonica, based on the good men who came out of it.

### **Thessalonica, the city.**

The city was named after Thessalonike, half-sister of Alexander the Great and wife of Cassander, an Alexandrian general . Her name means “victory of Thessaly” and refers to the triumph of Thessalian horsemen in a battle of her father, Philip II. Thessaly was a region of ancient Greece.

The city grew in importance to the point where, near the time of Paul’s visit, it had become the capital of all the Greek provinces. Its prime location made it a serious trade center, and thus a strategic place for the rise of the church.

These facts are recorded in Wikipedia, which goes on to say:

*About 50 AD, while on his second missionary journey, Paul the Apostle reasoned with the Jews from the Scriptures in this city's chief synagogue on three Sabbaths and sowed the seeds for Thessaloniki's first Christian church. During Paul's time in the city, he convinced some people among both Jews and Greeks to adopt Christian beliefs, as well as some of the city's leading women. However, Jews who kept their faith no longer wished for sectarian strife in their synagogues, and banned Paul and his companions from their midst. Because they were no longer welcome, Silas and Timothy were eventually sent out of Thessaloniki by the new Christian converts. From there the evangelizers went to Veroia, aka Berea, where they succeeded in converting some people in that city as well. The three men eventually continued their travels, and Paul wrote two letters to the new church at Thessaloniki, probably between 51 and 53, the First Epistle to the Thessalonians and the Second Epistle to the Thessalonians.*

**The Eschatological (last things) content of the Thessalonian letters.**

The following document is not a commentary on First and Second Thessalonians. My purpose in writing is to enlarge on those portions of the two letters that concern the end times, namely:

1 Thessalonians 1:9-10; 3:12-13; 4:13-18; 5:1-11

2 Thessalonians 1:3-10; 2:1-12

Following are the texts, gathered into one place for your perusal before you begin reading any of my comments. May the Lord speak to you and begin to unravel the mystery of your own future, as well as free you from things you may have heard outside the Word of God.

*Note: All Biblical quotes here and throughout the book are from the New King James Version, unless otherwise noted.*

**1 Thessalonians 1:9-10**

*...you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, [10](#)and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.*

**1 Thessalonians 3:12-13**

*[12](#)And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love to one another and to all, just as we do to you, [13](#)so that He may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints.*

**1 Thessalonians 4:13-18.**

[13](#)But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope. [14](#)For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus. [15](#)For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. [16](#)For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. [17](#)Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. [18](#)Therefore comfort one another with these words.

**1 Thessalonians 5:1-11.**

[1](#)But concerning the times and the seasons, brethren, you have no need that I should write to you. [2](#)For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night. [3](#)For when they say, "Peace and safety!" then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labor pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape. [4](#)But you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief. [5](#)You are all sons of light and sons of the day. We are not of the night nor of darkness. [6](#)Therefore let us not sleep, as others do, but let us watch and be sober. [7](#)For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk are drunk at night. [8](#)But let us who are of the day be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet the hope of salvation. [9](#)For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, [10](#)who died for us, that whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with Him.

[11](#)Therefore comfort each other and edify one another, just as you also are doing.

## **2 Thessalonians 1:3-12.**

[3](#)We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is fitting, because your faith grows exceedingly, and the love of every one of you all abounds toward each other, [4](#)so that we ourselves boast of you among the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that you endure, [5](#)which is manifest evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you also suffer; [6](#)since it is a righteous thing with God to repay with tribulation those who trouble you, [7](#)and to give you who are troubled rest with us when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, [8](#)in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. [9](#)These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power, [10](#)when He comes, in that Day, to be glorified in His saints and to be admired among all those who believe, because our testimony among you was believed. [11](#)Therefore we also pray always for you that our God would count you worthy of this calling, and fulfill all the good pleasure of His goodness and the work of faith with power, [12](#)that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and you in Him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

## **2 Thessalonians 2:1-12.**

[1](#)Now, brethren, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, we ask you, [2](#)not to be soon 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. [3](#)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, [4](#)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.*

*[5](#)Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you these things? [6](#)And now you know what is restraining, that he may be revealed in his own time. [7](#)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. [8](#)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. [9](#)The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders, [10](#)and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved. [11](#)And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie, [12](#)that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.*

Within these verses, when coupled with Daniel, John, and of course Jesus, *is our very future*. May the Holy Spirit arouse our curiosity to know some of the things God has prepared for us.

## 1 Thessalonians

### 1 Thessalonians 1:1-4:12 summary.

Though, as mentioned, I will not be writing a full commentary on these letters, a bit of a summary of the chapters and verses surrounding the above texts may be helpful. We begin with the initial verses of 1 Thessalonians.

Timothy has just arrived from Thessalonica and given a positive report of the progress of the Thessalonian church. He and Paul and Silas immediately write this letter as a happy response to the news.

A question arises even here, the answer to which may be helpful later:

#### Is Paul writing to the *church* or the *saints* ?

1 and 2 Thessalonians are both addressed to the *church* of Thessalonica, in 1:1 of both letters. After that greeting, the word *church* is not found. But the word *saints* is found in both letters.

Take a look.

1 Thessalonians 3:13

13...so that He may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His **saints**.

2 Thessalonians 1:10

10when He comes, in that Day, to be glorified in His **saints** and to be admired among all those who believe...

What did I just prove? Absolutely *nothing*.

Now look at the book of Revelation with me. The pre-tribulation argument runs as follows:

Because the *church*, by which they mean the word “church,” does not appear after chapter 3 in Revelation, therefore there is no church on earth after chapter 3. To them, the occurrence of the word *saints* in many places in Revelation does not mean the *church*. It is a special breed of Christian being referenced by John, which they call “Tribulation Saints.”

Where did they get that? Well... (and the logic doesn’t get any better...), you see, in Revelation chapter 4, John is caught up to heaven. What you didn’t know, but we pre-trib people know, is that when John was caught up to heaven, the *entire church* went up with him! That’s why there’s no “church” in 3-18 of Revelation.

Oh yes. That’s what they say.

I ran that scenario by a couple of friends of mine recently. I read to them Revelation 4:1, where John indeed is raptured. Temporarily. For revelation purposes only. I asked them, “Tell me in your own words what I just read. Here is the verse: *After these things I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven, and the first voice which I had heard, like the sound of a trumpet speaking with me, said, “Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after these things.”*

They said to me simply, “John was caught up to heaven.” They were a bit surprised when I told them the explanation I gave you above.

Friends, there’s just too many things to believe when one starts rearranging the Scriptures.

You see, by that logic, Revelation 11:12 must be a signal for yet another rapture. There, the two “witnesses” are given the same invitation as was John in chapter 4, “Come up here.”

And we can’t leave out the rapture that must have taken place when *Paul also was caught up to Paradise*.

What the pre-trib people have done is practice the age-old process called *eisegesis*. They’ve read their doctrine into various texts of Scripture and asked us to believe them on the basis of their own conclusions, not the text itself.

As for those *saints* in Revelation, their prayers are documented in 5:8 and 8:3-4; their slaughter by antichrist is recorded in 13:7 & 10; their persecution by Babylon is in 17:6; their connection to the Lamb and invitation to His Supper is in 19:8.

Ah, but wait! From this 19<sup>th</sup> chapter the theorists claim that the *saints are again the church*. Only the church would be invited to the Supper. Only the final phase of the Kingdom expression would be in chapter 20, being attacked by the released enemy of the saints.

But the word *church* is still not there.

No, friends, the *saints* are the holy people of God. Need I list all the places in the New Testament where the church is called holy, and sanctified, and *saints*? I think not.

Yes, there are indeed some special saints who go through the Tribulation. They are you, precious believer in Jesus. And they are me, by God’s grace. If we are now living in the very last days, we shall indeed go through the Tribulation.

**Back to the summary.**

Chapter one tells us that Paul's memory of the church is nothing but outstanding. He is convinced that the Thessalonians are indeed elected of God as he recalls the way the Holy Spirit manifested among them.

He does not forget the difficult times they had, but he recognizes that the problems that arose only increased their faith and strength in the Lord. He is very happy with this church.

But even in this first chapter (verse 10) the mention of the waiting for Jesus' return is on Paul's mind, for they are serving the living God and waiting

*for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.*

In 5:9 this wrath topic will arise again, and we will cover it more thoroughly. For now, a simple concept:

*Tribulation* (Trouble) *is not wrath*. There is no Scriptural promise that God's people will be released from *trouble*, but more than one that keeps us from the coming *wrath* of God. Let's take a look at the idea of trouble in the Bible, also known as *tribulation*.

**Tribulation.**

The Greek for this word means simply *pressure*. I say simply. But pressure is what causes all kinds of trouble in our lives. The persecuted church of our day is under severe pressure, to the point where many grow ill and die. Pressure kills.

The difference between the pressures, or tribulations, or troubles, or afflictions – for so is the word translated variously – of our day and the coming Tribulation is merely the extent of those pressures.

Only a few believers will survive.

I have capitalized Tribulation above because of something Jesus – and before Him, Daniel – revealed to us. There is coming a time of unprecedented *tribulation*, a time like never before. That, connected Biblically to the great apostasy, or rebellion, of antichrist, will make for the perfect storm of Satan. Thankfully, his time will be short.

I said above that there is no promise in Scripture that we are to be released from *tribulation*. Correct. Capital letter or no capital letter, there is a multitude of evidence that we are indeed *appointed to tribulation*.

Quite the opposite of what we hear these days.

Consider these verses, where I have only used the word translated “tribulation” as it is found in the New King James version of the New Testament. I have not included the other words that come from that Greek original. So what you see here is a *partial* list of promises you may want to keep in mind when attempting to determine a little of the Christian’s future.

Matthew 24:9. Says Jesus about the end times,

*Then they will deliver you up to **tribulation** and kill you, and you will be hated by all nations for My name’s sake.*

That’s a promise.

Matthew 24:21. Again, Jesus.

*For then there will be great **tribulation**, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be.*

Worse than the A.D. 70 slaughter? The Holocaust? The world wars? Yes. Worse. But still being labeled *tribulation*.

Matthew 24:29. When will they see the sign of the Son of Man in the Heavens, about to come to Earth? The Son of Man told us:

*Immediately **after** the **tribulation** of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken.*

This is the most “explained away” verse of the New Testament. But it’s still true.

John 16:33. Another promise of Jesus:

*These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have **tribulation**; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.*

Hear Paul now. Romans 5:3.

*And not only that, but we also glory in **tribulations**, knowing that **tribulation** produces perseverance...*

Romans 8:35.

*Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall **tribulation**, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?*

No. Not God’s true ones. They will persevere.

Romans 12:12. We must be

*rejoicing in hope, patient in **tribulation**, continuing steadfastly in prayer...*

2 Corinthians 7:4.

*Great is my boldness of speech toward you, great is my boasting on your behalf. I am filled with comfort. I am exceedingly joyful in all our **tribulation**.*

1 Thessalonians 3:4. A note to the church that supposedly is given a promise of a seven-year-ahead-of-time escape from the Tribulation.

*For, in fact, we told you before when we were with you that we would suffer **tribulation**, just as it happened, and you know.*

Revelation 1:9. Then there is the apostle John, who recorded the Tribulation events. Suffering tribulation in his day...

*I, John, both your brother and companion in the **tribulation** and kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ...*

Revelation 2:9. Again Jesus, to one of His congregations:

*I know your works, **tribulation**, and poverty (but you are rich);*

Revelation 2:10. Not, "Fear not, I'll deliver you from tribulation," but

*Do not fear any of those things which you are **about to suffer**. Indeed, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have **tribulation** ten days.*

Revelation 7:9-14. The great multitude. These are they that were raptured from the Great Tribulation, right? Uh, no...

*After these things I looked, and behold, **a great multitude which no one could number**, of all nations, tribes, peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands,*

And “Who are these?” asks the angel... Hear well the answer:

*...he said to me, These are the ones who come out of **the great tribulation**, and washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.*

And our modern theologians tell us that these folks who went through unprecedented **tribulation** and were slaughtered by antichrist, are nothing more than a bunch of second-class Christians who got “left behind” when Jesus came the first time, were given a second chance, and are now allowed in with the rest of the church?

They ask too much of us!

Let’s keep it simple! Above all, let’s keep it accurate! These blood-washed, white-robed saints of God are the very *church of the Lord Jesus Christ that was forced to go through the worst calamity earth has ever known*, and then welcomed into the glories of heaven as they and the surrounding angels give praise to the Lamb.

They were promised that the antichrist would overcome them, and in terms of human life-span, he did, but he merely sent them into the Throne Room of the Lamb.

## **Continuing with the summary of the beginning chapters of 1 Thessalonians...**

The first 12 verses of chapter 2 speak of Paul's conduct while he was initiating his ministry in their city. He reminds them of the shameful treatment he received in Philippi, yet the ability he had to overcome any bitterness and preach a comforting word to the Thessalonians.

He recalls to their memory that he had not tried to please men, had not flattered anyone, did not seek glory, or money. He had been as gentle as a nursing mother, willing to lay down his life for them if necessary. He then changes the image to *fathering* and brings to their mind the serious teachings he enjoined upon them.

They are to recall next how they received the word of God through much suffering at the hands of the Jews. He tells them of the coming – if not current – judgment of those who have hindered the Gospel.

The end of chapter 2 blends into the beginning of chapter 3 with nearly tearful recollections of Paul's urgent desire to know their progress, his attempts to visit that were hindered, and finally his sending of Timothy to them for a full report.

3:6 and following informs the Thessalonians of Timothy's news and Paul's subsequent comfort. A deep sigh of relief one can feel as he reads through these verses. The chapter ends with a prayer for God's further establishment of the Thessalonian church.

In chapter 3, verse 13, we see another short reference to the coming of the Lord. He is to come back *with all His saints*. This can only refer to the second coming, as we have heard it for centuries, not a private meeting in the air prior to that coming. The pre-

tribulation teaching is that Jesus comes *for* His saints in what they label the *rapture* . In this passage, He comes *with* them. The saints have been with Jesus from the first centuries. He brings them with Him and at the same time raises the rest of the saints to finish the number. Much more of this later.

Chapter 4 begins with an extended exhortation to moral purity, and continues with similar encouragements to brotherly love, a quiet life, hard work, and proper behavior to the unsaved.

Then a sudden shift to the future. It seems that the Thessalonian church, as the church of our day, was riddled with false ideas about the things that concern death and the afterlife. These were people who had been partaking of a pagan culture, and many pagan ideas still mixed themselves into their thinking. Paul will set them – and us – straight on these matters.

## Concerning the departed saints.

### 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18.

[13](#)But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope. [14](#)For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus.

[15](#)For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. [16](#)For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. [17](#)Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. [18](#)Therefore comfort one another with these words.

### What happens to the dead saints?

Christians die. The old Adamic nature gives way to a new body. But first century saints needed information from apostles about what happens at and after death. So do we. What happens to a dead Christian?

Nothing to cry about, says Paul. The world has much to sorrow about, but not us. They have no hope. We have hope.

There is a big “if” in verse 14: *IF we believe that Jesus died and rose again*, the rest of this promise follows. For us, the word can be *since*. One cannot even be a Christian if he does not believe that Jesus died and rose again. Since we do, here is what we can expect...

*God* is going to bring resurrected saints with Him. Here is the first of the formerly unknown facts, or *mysteries* entrusted to Paul for us. Jesus spoke of resurrection in His Olivet discourse, but not in such specific terms. There (Matthew 24), the saints are gathered to Jesus as He returns following the Great Tribulation. But here, *God* brings the saints *with Him* when He comes.

Meaning? There are saints in Heaven now. Many of them. There will be many more before the end, and a great harvest of souls slaughtered by the antichrist will arrive in Glory before that day. When Jesus is released to come to earth, He – called *God* here – will bring all those saints with Him.

But at that last moment, the living saints will also be called up to meet Him in the air. Both ideas are true. They come *with Him*, they are gathered *to Him*, all at the same time.

#### **Just how many resurrections are there?**

The idea that surfaced a couple centuries ago known as the *pre-tribulation rapture* maintains that there will be a resurrection of the saints just before the unprecedented horrors of earth begin, allowing the faithful to escape to the safety of Heaven. Jesus will appear, it is said, and great merriment will occur in heaven at the Marriage Supper of the Lamb, while on earth, Hell's worst will prevail. After that seven-year period, Jesus will return yet again, this time coming all the way to earth, and fulfill the prophecies about a second coming.

It might be interesting to note here that the pre-tribulation theory – and it is but a theory – becomes difficult to maintain when counting the resurrections of Scripture.

Jesus spoke of only two. In John 5:29 he mentions a resurrection of *life* and a resurrection of *condemnation*. John himself, in the Revelation accorded him, chapter 20, makes it easy for us to identify both resurrections, though he is given the later insight that there will be one thousand years between the two.

The first resurrection John describes in 20:4-5:

***4**And I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was committed to them. Then I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their witness to Jesus and for the word of God, who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received his mark on their foreheads or on their hands. And they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. **5**But the rest of the dead did not live again until the thousand years were finished. **This is the first resurrection.***

And this is the resurrection immediately preceding the Millennial reign, when Jesus gathers His own from the four winds of Heaven and sets up His Kingdom. It is our belief that not only martyrs, but all who were born again of His Spirit are included in this resurrection, for there is no other such resurrection spoken of in the New Testament.

But there is a *second* resurrection, one thousand years later. We know it as the Great White Throne judgment, the resurrection of damnation.

***11**Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them. **12**And I saw the dead, small and great, **standing before God**, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the*

books. [13](#)The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works. [14](#)Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. [15](#)And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire.

Two resurrections. Life and condemnation. One at the beginning of the thousand years, one at the end.

May I ask, where does the resurrection of 1 Thessalonians 4 fit into this? According to the theorists, the passage before us is a resurrection, called by them the *rapture*, seven years earlier, seven years before the Millennium begins, seven years *before the resurrection at His coming*. How does that work?

Are there actually *three* resurrections? But the Word says *two*.

Solution: *1 Thessalonians 4 is none other than the second coming of Christ! It is not a secret coming. It would have been the most visible well-covered news story of the ages! Trouble is, those who would cover it will either be with Jesus in the air, or hiding under rocks to shelter them from the judgment that has come.*

#### **About soul-sleep.**

#### **4:14-15**

[13](#)But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have **fallen asleep**, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope. [14](#)For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him **those who sleep in Jesus**.

Notice that twice in this section Paul refers to the dead as *sleeping*.

Those who refuse to search all the Scriptures on this subject, and cling instead to this one word from Paul, have come to the conclusion that when we die, not only do our bodies sleep, but our souls and spirits likewise are unconscious until the resurrection.

But that would not fit with the facts. To whom was Jesus calling when he addressed the tomb of the dead Lazarus? The decaying body could not hear Jesus. He spoke to the living spirit of Lazarus and commanded him to revitalize the flesh and bones.

Consider the martyrs of Revelation's 5<sup>th</sup> seal. John was permitted to "see" their *souls* (Revelation 6:9). Did he notice that they were quietly sleeping there "under the altar," having sweet dreams of Jesus? No, actually they were shouting out, very much alive, wanting to know how long it would be before their blood was avenged? They were told to rest – but not sleep – just a bit longer.

Then there is the story Jesus told of a certain rich man and a certain poor man named Lazarus (not to be confused with his Bethany friend). Some want to call this a parable, but no matter, the message is the same. People in that other world, awaiting the resurrection, can hold conversations. They are not asleep.

And remember Jesus' words to the dying thief on the cross next to His? "Today, you will be with me in Paradise." Be with Jesus to enjoy a long sleep? I don't think so.

Let's let Paul himself, since in the detractors' minds he is the one that started all this, answer the question of sleeping saints. Did he not say elsewhere that when we are absent from the body we will be present with the Lord?

Present. Alive. Active. Only waiting for a glorified body, but very much alive, very much awake!

Soul-sleeping is not taught in Scripture. Let it go.

**No one left behind.**

**4:15**

*For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep.*

When Jesus comes, there will be a gathering of saints. Those who have gone to be with Jesus, and those still alive on earth. Paul wants to let the believers know that God is going to open the graves first, gather all those saints to Him, then catch up the ones who are alive, who still remain after the horrible trouble the world has just gone through.

In case they were worried that somehow the living would have an advantage over them, or somehow they would be forgotten altogether, Paul grants this encouraging word.

Significant for its non-appearance is the notion of a group of believers who are left behind. Lukewarm saints. Second class saints.

Oh, many will be left behind indeed. All of them, unbelievers. All of them, "I never knew you." All of them, lost for eternity.

**The gathering or the coming?**

Those who hold to the idea that Jesus gathers his own at the *rapture* (a word we will deal with later) will tell us that the *gathering* and the *coming* of the Lord are two different events. But here, in the most famous *rapture* passage of all, the proceedings are called the *coming* of the Lord (verse 15).

*...we who are alive and remain until the **coming** of the Lord...*

I will try hard not to be cynical here, but is not Jesus able to do two things at once? Or even more than two? Can He not appear in the sky, gather His people to Himself, and *come to earth*, all at once?

Seems like I remember a verse that says that very thing. Please turn to Matthew 24, a passage acknowledged by pre-tribulation people to be a description of the final *coming* of the Lord, or the “second coming” as we know it. Let’s read very slowly, very carefully.

24:29 speaks of the *tribulation* and the show in the heavens of a mighty shaking of creation.

24:30 then speaks of the actual coming of the Lord. There He is in the sky! Read it yourself,

***29****Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. **30**Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.*

Are you with me? Have I misspoken at all? Now read verse 31. In my Bible it says that Jesus will send His **angels**

*with a great sound of a **trumpet**, and they will **gather together His elect** from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.*

There are **angels** in both passages, here and Matthew. Check.

There is a **trumpet** in both passages, here and Matthew. Check.

He appears **in the sky**, here and Matthew. Check.

He **gathers all His own** here and Matthew. Check.

Chapter 25:31 and following picks up the story from there. He proceeds to earth and sits on His throne. Judgment ensues. Not to mention the judgment described in Revelation, as Jesus, in another picture, is seen coming backed up by the armies of heaven, clothed in fine linen, His righteousness in them, the very saints of God seen gathered in Matthew 24.

### **Check.**

Are there other second-coming narratives in Scripture? Yes indeed, one for sure, and it too is gobbled up by the pre-trib promoters as their own. But 1 Corinthians 15:51-52 is also about the very same event:

***51**Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed— **52**in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the **last trumpet**. For the trumpet will sound, and the **dead will be raised incorruptible**, and we shall be changed...*

No angel, but a **trumpet**. Check.

Jesus is not mentioned here, but **“the dead are raised”** equals **“gathers all His own.”** Check.

Now I ask you, why do we need to insert into the narrative *another* appearance in the sky, *another* gathering of the saints, *another* trumpet?

Answer: *We don't need to at all. One second coming* is enough. This has been the teaching of the church for many centuries. No need to change it at all.

### **About that archangel.**

**4:16**

*For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel...*

Only the first Thessalonian letter mentions an *archangel* in connection with the coming of the Lord. And it is “an” archangel, not “the” archangel as in Jude 1:9, where Jude speaks of Michael’s controversy with Satan.

We do not know the name of this angel. But there is an intriguing passage or two in John’s Revelation that might lead to his identity, and further cement the case for a *post*-tribulation rapture.

Revelation 10 and 11 may hold the key here. Chapter 10 begins by introducing a *mighty* angel. Not all angels are the same in strength and size, we presume.

A magnificent description follows. Within a few verses he is announcing that time is about to run out on the planet Earth. The mystery of God is to be finished during the days of the sounding of the seventh trumpet, which will be spelled out in chapter 11.

In chapter 11, the seventh angel indeed sounds. And, matching the climate of 1 Thessalonians 4:16, we hear *loud voices* . Is one of them the *voice of an archangel* heard by Paul?

The significance of all this? This angel is announcing the commencement of the Kingdom, *the Millennial Reign*. One more strong suggestion that Paul, who speaks of this archangel, was not seeing a coming of Jesus seven years before the Kingdom began, but was seeing the final coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.

**And the Trumpet...**

There is always the sound of a **trumpet** in these end-time pictures. Is there a significance to their mention, is there something we can understand better by knowing what the trumpet means? I think so.

Let's go way back, all the way to Exodus 20. The Ten Commandments. Frightening sounds and sights for the children of Israel. One of those sounds was a trumpet. No, don't think about a shiny gold instrument in a modern orchestra. Think of a male sheep. A ram. Other animals can be used, but the traditional and preferred horn comes from the ram.

Rams are not killed merely for their horns, but when they are killed, for food etc., the horn is carefully cut off the ram's head, and skillfully cleaned and hollowed, and shaped a bit. After a final shine, the horn is ready to be blown at festive occasions such as at the beginning of the year.

I speak of men's trumpets, trumpets that the Jews and their Messianic counterparts use here on earth. But there is a heavenly version of the *shofar* that is being referenced here. I have no idea where they come from though we can believe they are sounded by angelic beings.

Back to earth. The trumpet of the Hebrews is mentioned in Leviticus as a part of celebrations such as the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 25:9) and in the Psalms in connection with battles.

Isaiah introduces an end-time use of the trumpet, more to our purposes. In Isaiah 27:13, we are told that "in that day," referring to what seems to be a final judgment scene throughout chapter 27, "the great trumpet will be blown." This will signal the release of a remnant of Assyrians and Egyptians, and their call to worship the returned Messiah in Jerusalem!

Yes, *a final trumpet!*

Zechariah 9 is another end-time scene. The very coming of the Lord is prophesied verses 9 and 10. Right after the familiar Triumphal Entry passage (verse 9) the prophecy continues with no break in between except the break we know happened historically,

*I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim and the horse from Jerusalem; The battle bow shall be cut off. He shall speak peace to the nations; His dominion shall be 'from sea to sea, And from the River to the ends of the earth.'*

And then?

Well, then, prisoners are set free. The Lord appears. Lightning. And (verse 14), "The Lord God will **blow the trumpet** and go with whirlwinds from the south..."

Judgment of some, defense of others. A magnificent day.

Is this not also ***the last trumpet?***

Consider the New Testament passages now, in light of the old:

Matthew 24:30-31,

*Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. **31** And He will send His angels with a great **sound of a trumpet...***

Does that not sound like Zechariah to you? Now remember, this Matthew 24 passage is, in the eyes of the pre-trib rapture people, *not* a rapture text! But the trumpet is there. *The last trumpet.*

Now look at 1 Corinthians 15:51-52,

*We shall all be changed in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at **the last trumpet**. For **the trumpet will sound...***

“The” trumpet. The one seen and heard by the prophets. And by Jesus. The *last one*, yes? And this *is* a “rapture passage” in the view we have been studying.

Now hear from Paul again in the letter we are examining, 1 Thessalonians 4:16,

*For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and **with the trumpet of God...***

Again with “the” trumpet. A specific one. And this verse also is considered by theorists as happening seven years before the second coming. But Paul makes it clear that it is the *last* trumpet. And we have seen that there is that trumpet at the second coming. How could this one be the last, and the second-coming trumpet also be the last?

Let’s give the apostle John the last word on this subject, as he is given the last word in Revelation. Turn to that book, chapter 11, verse 15.

Most of you are aware of a succession of seven trumpets that are blown in John’s book. Judgment after judgment is recorded. Now, in a list of seven items, would it not be fair to suggest that the *seventh* is the *last*?

I thought you would agree. So let’s look at the *last trumpet* of Revelation and see what happens there.

**15***Then the seventh angel sounded: And there were loud voices in heaven, saying, “The kingdoms of this world have become the*

*kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!"*

***16**And the twenty-four elders who sat before God on their thrones fell on their faces and worshiped God,*

***17**saying:"We give You thanks, O Lord God Almighty, The One who is and who was and who is to come, Because You have taken Your great power and reigned.*

***18**The nations were angry, and Your wrath has come, And the time of the dead, that they should be judged, And that You should reward Your servants the prophets and the saints, And those who fear Your name, small and great, And should destroy those who destroy the earth."*

Do you see it? When the *seventh [last] trumpet* sounds, Jesus returns. The Kingdom is His. He begins His reign. Judgment.

The **last trumpet** signals the triumphant return of Jesus Christ. This is in keeping with all that the prophets said. All that Jesus said. And all that Paul said.

There is no trumpet sound seven years earlier. None. Nada. This has been read into the text and in my opinion is a serious error.

### **The rapture passage?**

Now, about the Greek word *harpazo*. Strong's Concordance says it means "to catch, steal, carry off."

It's translated "caught up" four times in Scripture. It's also rendered "take by force," "pluck," "caught away" and "pulling" (all KJV).

Those four “caught up” passages are as follows: Two of them are used by Paul of his private audience with the Lord in Paradise. One references the catching up of Jesus to the Father, in the Revelation imagery of chapter 12. The other one is here in 1 Thessalonians 4.

Because *harpazo* is used here and nowhere else in describing the gathering to Christ, pre-tribulation folks have snatched this passage as a rapture passage, the one we hear most quoted by them.

Wait a minute. Did I miss something? *Harpazo* means *caught up*. Where does the word *rapture* come into play? Easy. *Rapere* is the Latin word that translates the Greek *harpazo*. *Rapere* has the same basic meaning and sounds a lot like *rapture*. Get it?

Okay, not so easy. But that’s where the word comes from. It has nothing to do with the standard English usage of the word, meaning “ecstasy.” It’s a new word for a new idea.

Obviously, there is no such word in the English Bible. Makes it a bit difficult to discuss, Biblically.

### **Eisegesis.**

I ask you another question. If you were reading 1 Thessalonians 4 for the first time, or the 10<sup>th</sup> or 100<sup>th</sup>, would you ever imagine that Paul was talking about anything different from what Jesus described in Matthew 24?

Would you have reached the conclusion that because Paul used the words “caught up” here, and Jesus did not, that they were talking about two different events? The church did not until the 19<sup>th</sup> century!

In your mind would not “gather together His elect from the four winds” sound very much like “caught up together with them in the

clouds”? Jesus is in the active voice, Paul in the passive. Both seem to say the same thing, don’t you think?

I mean, really?

*Eisegesis* is the knack that many have of taking their own ideas and reading them into a text of Scripture. In other words, for many decades now, Christians have been taught that Jesus comes in the *air*, and then, later, to the *earth*. They are convinced of it, and read that idea stubbornly into many texts, pushing and shoving and squeezing until the Biblical teaching looks exactly like their own.

Well, we understand. We all do this to a measure, yes? I personally believe the long-standing tradition of one more second coming, and only one, minus an appearance seven years earlier. And I read that thought into all the Scriptures I examine.

Is that wrong? I mean, to keep believing what you were taught from the beginning by people you trusted? To examine them further, and then agree with commentaries and scholars down through history on this subject? To reject novelties, late-coming doctrines?

I think not. I think it is wise.

In other works, I have traced the history of pretribulation thought. In short, such thought does not exist until the 1830’s, in England. It is totally traceable to a false prophetess and a Bible teacher of that era.

And most of the church, looked at worldwide, still does not accept it. Why should they? It is a Western idea, and promotes escape from suffering and hardship.

If it is possible for you, set aside this and every other book on the subject right now, as much as lies in you, and read 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 as though you were looking at it for the first time.

What do you see? Jesus is coming. He will descend from Heaven. Saints in the graves and saints on the ground will be caught up to meet Him.

And when does all this happen? Before or after the tribulation? *Paul does not say.* For the answer to that you must look at other verses.

Do you understand my point now? The words are simple and clear. But we are told that here is the proof of the pre-tribulation catching up of the saints.

No. No proof at all.

But surely there is *one verse* in the Bible that says what they are saying? No, not one. At least I haven't found it. Have you?

## Concerning the times and the seasons.

### 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11.

[1](#)But concerning the times and the seasons, brethren, you have no need that I should write to you. [2](#)For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night. [3](#)For when they say, "Peace and safety!" then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labor pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape. [4](#)But you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief. [5](#)You are all sons of light and sons of the day. We are not of the night nor of darkness. [6](#)Therefore let us not sleep, as others do, but let us watch and be sober. [7](#)For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk are drunk at night. [8](#)But let us who are of the day be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet the hope of salvation. [9](#)For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, [10](#)who died for us, that whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with Him. [11](#)Therefore comfort each other and edify one another, just as you also are doing.

### The day of the Lord.

#### 5:1-2

[1](#)But concerning the times and the seasons, brethren, you have no need that I should write to you. [2](#)For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night...

Paul has taught his dear friends well. Here (verses 1-2) he says that the church is well aware of how the day of the Lord comes. In 2

Thessalonians 2:5 he reminds them that he had also told them of the antichrist.

Paul must have received extensive training from the Lord in this area. And we assume he searched the prophetic words of Daniel and others. Then he passed on this treasure trove of knowledge to his audiences.

They knew perfectly about the *day of the Lord*, and the years leading up to it.

We must stop here and take a serious look at this expression. Many teachers will say many things about *the day of the Lord*. What does God say? What did the prophets say? Let's look.

### **Isaiah.**

We begin with Isaiah: chapter 2.

***12***For the day of the LORD of hosts shall come upon everything proud and lofty, upon everything lifted up— And it shall be brought low—

Then a verse that John's Revelation echoes:

***19***They shall go into the holes of the rocks, and into the caves of the earth, from the terror of the LORD and the glory of His majesty, when He arises to shake the earth mightily.

The Day of the Lord means judgment, says Isaiah. And this judgment corresponds to the time of *the coming of the Lord*, as in Matthew 24, and the subsequent dissolving of all things at the end of John's sixth seal (Revelation 6). A great cataclysmic shaking of all things, as seen before *and after* the Millennial kingdom.

What else does Isaiah see?

The prophet goes on to enumerate a long list of activities that will take place “in that day,” begun and ended with these severe judgments. He speaks of one long millennial *Day*, when Israel will be clean, and the “Branch” of the Lord will be beautiful.

Isaiah 13 returns to the theme of judgment, and uses terms once more that Jesus used in the Olivet Discourse (Matthew 24):

***6**Wail, for the day of the LORD is at hand! It will come as destruction from the Almighty. **7**Therefore all hands will be limp, every man’s heart will melt, **8**and they will be afraid. Pangs and sorrows will take hold of them; **9**Behold, the day of the LORD comes, cruel, with both wrath and fierce anger, to lay the land desolate; and He will destroy its sinners from it. **10**For the stars of heaven and their constellations will not give their light; the sun will be darkened in its going forth, and the moon will not cause its light to shine.*

Putting these prophecies from Isaiah together, we see the beginning and ending of the Millennium, and the Millennium itself, as the Day of the Lord.

This meshes with Revelation 19 and 20, where first we see Jesus coming back to rule and judge and punish the wicked (19:11-21). We next see a one-thousand-year period where thrones are set up and Jesus and the saints rule (20:1-10). And then comes the very end, the final judgment, the dissolving that Isaiah and Peter speak of.

Isaiah and the apostles are in perfect agreement.

### **Jeremiah.**

The only time the phrase is used by this prophet is in 46:10:

*For this is the **day of the Lord** GOD of hosts, a day of vengeance, that He may avenge Himself on His adversaries. The sword shall devour; it shall be satiated and made drunk with their blood; for the Lord GOD of hosts has a sacrifice in the north country by the River Euphrates.*

While this may have end-time ramifications, it is part of a prophecy directed to God's vengeance on Egypt. Which leads us to believe that at times the expression *day of the Lord* has a more local content. It is sometimes God's appointed day to do business with a particular segment of the world's population, not the whole world. Context lets us know which prophecies are of this nature and which are end-time related.

#### **Ezekiel.**

*30:3, For the day is near, even the **day of the LORD** is near; it will be a day of clouds, the time of the Gentiles.*

Here several nations of the world are seen falling one by one. But once more, Egypt, and some of her allies, are the main subject. It is not clear whether this has been totally fulfilled or whether it is still in our future. If so, it fits the end-time pattern of alliances coming with antichrist against the returning Christ the first light of the "Day of the Lord."

#### **Joel.**

*1:15 Alas for the day! For the **day of the LORD** is at hand; it shall come as destruction from the Almighty.*

*2:1 Blow the trumpet in Zion, and sound an alarm in My holy mountain! Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble; for the **day of the LORD** is coming, for it is at hand:*

*2:11 The LORD gives voice before His army, for His camp is very great; for strong is the One who executes His word. For the **day of the LORD** is great and very terrible; who can endure it?*

*2:31 The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the coming of the great and awesome **day of the LORD**.*

*3:14 Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision! For the **day of the LORD** is near in the valley of decision.*

This prophet seems to weave back and forth between local happenings and end-time events. There is an overlapping that is at times confusing. 2:31 is the one of these five that clearly speaks of the *last* day. This very scenario is mentioned by Peter at Pentecost.

Revelation bears out the signs in the heavens, as does Jesus in Matthew 24. These extraordinary things happen just before Jesus appears in the sky, a heavenly announcement that the Day of the Lord has begun.

#### **Amos.**

*5:18-19. Woe to you who desire the **day of the LORD**! For what good is the **day of the LORD** to you? It will be darkness, and not light. It will be as though a man fled from a lion, and a bear met him...*

Could it be that during Tribulation days that precede the Lord's coming, there will be people crying out for the "day of the Lord" to come who are not ready for that day? They will go from the "frying pan into the fire." Literally. The Tribulation will be the worst thing earth has seen, but not the worst hell has to offer.

#### **Obadiah.**

1:15. *“For the **day of the LORD** upon all the nations is near; As you have done, it shall be done to you; Your reprisal shall return upon your own head.*

Judgment.

### **Zechariah.**

Zechariah 14 is probably the most significant word from the prophets of God about the coming day. Here are selections from that chapter, highlighting the end-time significance of the Day of the Lord.

***1**Behold, the day of the LORD is coming, ...**2**For I will gather all the nations to battle against Jerusalem; ...Half of the city shall go into captivity, but the remnant of the people shall not be cut off from the city. ...**4**And in that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, and the Mount of Olives shall be split in two, from east to west, ...Thus the LORD my God will come, and all the saints with You. **6**It shall come to pass in that day that there will be no light; the lights will diminish. **7**It shall be one day which is known to the LORD— neither day nor night. But at evening time it shall happen that it will be light. ...**9**And the LORD shall be King over all the earth. In that day it shall be— “The LORD is one,” and His name one.*

Zechariah tells us that the Day of the Lord starts with a battle, a battle which Jesus quickly wins and then takes His place in Jerusalem. Heavenly signs. The rule of Jesus.

Again, a match with the New Testament scenario.

### **So, now we know what is the Day of the Lord?**

All these prophetic utterances together tell us that the Day of the Lord is one long period of time in our future that begins with the triumphant return of Jesus, continues with His reign on earth, and ends with the final dissolution of all things in the earth and heavens. It's all about the final activities of *the Lord Jesus*.

We must try to understand that the word “day” is used in a variety of ways in our own language as well as the Biblical ones. *Day* can be twenty-four hours . *Day* can also refer to the daylight part of those twenty-four hours.

Or, we say, “He was a well-known figure *in his day*.” We mean a generation in this case.

“There’s a better *day* a-comin’ ,” said the old spiritual. This can be an indefinite time in our future.

Understanding the Day of the Lord in this latter way, and using all the words of the prophets on the subject, we more fully comprehend the words of Peter in his second epistle. Consider:

***10***But the ***day of the Lord*** will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up. ***11***Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, ***12***looking for and hastening the coming of ***the day of God***, because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat? ***13***Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.

Peter does not see the Millennial Kingdom at all. He sees the beginning of the Day of the Lord, which comes as a thief in the night with the return of Jesus. Then he sees the ending catastrophe, the entire dissolution of things, as did Isaiah. Yet both of these judgmental scenes are part of the Day of the Lord. Sandwiched in between the return and the annihilation of the Planet can be placed the kingdom revelations of Paul and John, not to mention the abundant descriptions of the prophets of old.

Jesus Himself, when He was here, did not mention the time between the resurrection of life and the resurrection of damnation

(John 5:28-29), though he did talk of both of those resurrections. It was left to John, in his last book, to spell out the time between the two, even assigning a number to that time.

If the coming of Jesus and the end of the earth are spread apart this way, it makes no sense to think of the Day of the Lord happening within 24 hours.

But there are individual 24-hour “days” that begin and end the larger “day.” The *Day of Christ* mentioned in Paul’s second letter to the Thessalonians, is an example of a twenty-four-hour day of this sort, in my opinion.

We must take into account the fact that with God, even a one-thousand-year period passes away as one day. So from beginning to end of this series of judgments and kingdom and more judgments and resurrections, one *day* has been consumed, in God’s mind.

***For further discussion of this matter, see below on 2 Thessalonians 2:2, “the Day of Christ.”***

### **The Thousand Years as the Day of the Lord.**

Not sure why the literalness of this time period is questioned by so many. Are other time periods of the Bible questioned? Yes, I know that people question a literal six-day creation. I do not. Is there a reason to do so?

Science, you say? But good scientists are on both sides of the evolutionary “millions of years” theory. There are good scientists who believe in a six-day creation. But since when is our faith dependent on scientific opinions anyway?

*A thousand years* is used nine times in the Bible. The first time is in the Psalms, 90:4.

*For a **thousand years** in Your sight are like yesterday when it is past, and like a watch in the night.*

It is this thinking that carried over into Peter's epistle, 3:8.

*But, beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day is as a **thousand years**, and a **thousand years** as one day.*

What are the writers saying? Time to God is not the same as time to us. In Peter's case he anticipated mockers coming in the last days challenging the idea of a return of Jesus. They would point out that Jesus had told us He was coming back and coming soon.

Peter suggests that in God's thinking, it was only a couple days ago that Jesus said that. One day, after all, in God's mind, is like a thousand years and vice versa.

Though one thousand years is not the only number that could be placed in this statement, it is interesting to me that this is the number that Peter used. For the time between the first and second judgments that are coming is said to be one thousand years. A Millennium. The Kingdom ruled by Jesus when He comes.

That is, *The **Day** of the Lord!*

Ecclesiastes 6:6 asks a hypothetical question about a person living one thousand years twice, and still not being satisfied...

*even if he lives a thousand years twice—but has not seen goodness. Do not all go to one place?*

The other six uses of the term *thousand years* are in Revelation 20:

*He laid hold of the dragon, that serpent of old, who is the Devil and Satan, and bound him for a **thousand years**; and he cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal on him, so that*

*he should deceive the nations no more till the **thousand years** were finished. But after these things he must be released for a little while.*

*And I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was committed to them. Then I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their witness to Jesus and for the word of God, who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received his mark on their foreheads or on their hands. And they lived and reigned with Christ for a **thousand years**.*

*But the rest of the dead did not live again until the **thousand years** were finished. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a **thousand years**.*

*Now when the **thousand years** have expired, Satan will be released from his prison*

Someone explain to me why I cannot take the word of God from an apostle of Jesus inspired by the Holy Spirit, just as it is.

### **Peace and Safety?**

#### **5:3**

*For when they say, "Peace and safety!" then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labor pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape*

Wait just a minute! I can hear someone saying, "How could Paul be talking about the Great Tribulation here, interrupted by the very return of Christ?"

After all, the people are living in “peace and safety,” then destruction comes as a shock. Doesn’t this 1 Thessalonians 5 scenario fit better into the pre-tribulation time, when all is well with the world?

First, there has never been a time when all is well with the world. Trouble abounds in generation after generation. The Tribulation does not come suddenly upon the world. It is a political decision that is made that starts the clock ticking in the book of Daniel, not a worldwide calamity.

Second, in every one of earth’s disasters, humans rise up and say, “We will not be defeated. We will start over. We will overcome.” Or words to that effect.

Yes, I know. The Tribulation will be filled with horrors we cannot imagine. But even then, there will be pockets of normalcy and a world ruler who will keep promising better things.

One of the astounding passages of Revelation, 9:20-21, is the cool stating of the fact that after huge percentages of the earth’s population has been *totally annihilated*, men still do not repent. Life goes on.

And worship of the antichrist goes on. Brainwashed men will continue to hang on to something, some vague hope, that all will get back to normal somehow.

And in those moments of relative calm mankind will be still believing in “peace and safety” and ultimate victory for the human race.

That’s when Jesus will come, for them, as a thief in the night. The night of humanity will have reached its darkest.

**A thief in the night. Imminence.**

One of the pillars upon which pre-tribulation rapturism is built, is the notion of an any-minute return of Christ. *Perhaps today* has been the slogan by which many of God's people have lived.

One way *imminence* works for me is to consider that at any moment my heart can stop beating. There is no promise of tomorrow or even the rest of today.

But to make this into a dogma that declares that because imminence is taught in the Bible – meaning Jesus could come at any time – therefore the antichrist and the apostasy do not have to come first, is to stretch things a bit. We will discuss this matter in the second letter, for sure.

The question for me is, is imminence taught in the Bible, and did Bible characters live under this idea? I thank internet minister Bob Mitchell for the following points:

When Jesus was here He predicted the Spirit would come. So, before He returned, the event of *Pentecost would have to take place*. No imminent return of Jesus.

Jesus told Paul at one time late in his ministry that he would be going to Rome. So the coming again of Jesus was not just any day. *Paul would have to go to Rome first*.

Our Lord also insinuated to Peter that he would be dying as an old man. No imminence here. Jesus could not come until *the event of Peter's old age* would take place.

The church of Smyrna, Revelation 2, is told they will be suffering tribulation at the hands of Satan for ten days. Jesus could not come until *those ten days* were up.

One item I found on my own is in Revelation 16, where are described the “bowl” judgments. Bowls of the wrath of God are poured out on those who worship the beast.

Are there still believers there during the bowl days, after the war antichrist has fought to exterminate them? Incredibly, yes. And as the battle of Armageddon is about to take place, we hear Jesus speaking to some saints, perhaps hidden away, perhaps tempted to sell out, perhaps terrorized by all that is going on:

*“Behold, I am coming as a thief. Blessed is he who watches, and keeps his garments, lest he walk naked and they see his shame.”*

First notice that there are indeed saints there. Then realize that the countdown has already begun among these saints. They know what the Bible says. They know the very year and perhaps month when Jesus is coming. But they are discouraged and nervous. Can they hold out to the very end?

Here is where the “blessed hope” becomes very blessed. Here is where the Scripture will come alive. Will Jesus come at just any minute and surprise them? For those not watching, yes. So Jesus tells them to *watch*.

In other words, here is an example of *imminence* being taught even for *the second coming*, towards the end of the tribulation, or even at its worst moments.

Do you see how imminence does not work in the way it is being taught today? Paul made it clear that there are some things that must take place. Watch for His coming for you today, but look not for His coming to earth until the word of God through Paul is fulfilled.

What about this “thief in the night” imagery?

Simple. Paul goes on to explain it himself. Those who walk in darkness will be caught off guard. Even in the midst of worldwide tribulation, the people of earth will be enraptured by antichrist's lies. The Word of God will be rare on the earth. Most will not know they are living through prophetic days. As Hitler systematically attempted to do away with the Jewish race of Jesus, the antichrist will attempt to do away with the born-again race of Jesus. He will be hugely successful, and the world will rejoice.

See how even now Biblical illiteracy is at an all-time high. Even in the church. Imagine a world where Biblical knowledge has practically been obliterated, because Christians are systematically being obliterated by antichrist. Terms like "tribulation" and "antichrist," unheard of. Cataclysmic changes in political structure and financial matters and a host of other cultural shifts will have people focused only on survival.

Antichrist will try his best to offer solutions to these crises, binding the world even more closely to himself and his desires. They will cry out from time to time, "We've done it! Peace at last! We're safe from harm! All is well."

Then sudden destruction. Jesus returns. As a thief.

Paul wants us to know that this picture of a thief coming in the middle of the night to steal your goods is not about you and me. It is about the lost of the world, the huge majority of ignorant unbelievers.

So the thrust of chapter 5, verses 4-8 is an exhortation for all of us to be sure we are walking in the light in these days, lest we seem to be going off into the darkness of the world around us.

**Not appointed to wrath.**

**5:9**

*For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ...*

Verse 9 has been a rallying point for those who persist in teaching the pre-tribulation rapture of the church. "We are not appointed to wrath!" they say. And all of God's true people say, "Amen."

The point? In the pre-trib mind, the Tribulation prophesied by Daniel and Jesus and John is the ultimate *wrath of God* being poured out on the earth. Since God has not appointed His people to wrath, God has not appointed us to go through the Tribulation, and God will send Jesus to rescue us from the coming wrath.

Conclusion to this logical argument? *Pre-tribulation rapture*. It just *has* to be!

Whoa! Not so fast, not so fast! You've misunderstood something...

God's wrath has been poured out many times throughout Biblical history. The nations that have come against Israel, not to mention Israel herself, have been objects of the wrath of God. All around us every day we see evidences of an angry God who punishes those who continually defy Him.

And God's Word through Paul here has rung true through it all. Those who have been true to God will not be rewarded with the wrath of God, certainly.

Nevertheless we have an angry enemy, as Revelation points out (12:12). There we are told he comes to earth "having great wrath"

because he knows he only has a short time to wreak his punishment on us.

He will, through antichrist, make war on the only people of God left, the Christians, and he will succeed in that war. Christians will die. They will enter heaven in great crowds, martyrs all.

And our God will let him do it. This is not God's wrath, it is the devil's. And we *have* been appointed to that wrath, as people all over the world today are dying at the hands of evil Satan-inspired men.

We are not magically protected from all evil, but the enemy's temporary wrath ends with our souls going straight to Jesus.

Paul is telling us in 5:9 that regardless of what is coming, our ultimate destination is His presence, not eternal wrath. Trouble and even martyrdom may be in our future, but that is not to be interpreted that God is angry with us, only that the devil is.

We should add that the *great* day of God's wrath does not come until all the tribulation years are past, and creation goes into chaos just preceding the return of Jesus. To that wrath we definitely are *not* appointed. This super-terrifying return of Jesus could well be what this verse is talking about. We shall be caught up when He returns, just before the wrath is poured out.

Do the prophets and apostles concur with this analysis? See for yourself:

Isaiah 13:9, speaking of the final coming of the Lord,

*[9](#)Behold, the day of the LORD comes, Cruel, with both **wrath** and fierce anger...*

Surely Revelation 11:18 is speaking of that final coming also. Here are judgments and rewards, certainly not expected in a “pre-tribulation” rapture. But here also is *wrath*. Notice it is *Your **wrath***. This is a day set aside by the Lord for the ultimate wrath of God to be poured out.

***18**The nations were angry, and Your **wrath** has come,  
And the time of the dead, that they should be judged,  
And that You should reward Your servants the prophets and the  
saints,*

Daniel 11:36 tells us that antichrist will accomplish all his purposes **until the wrath comes** and wipes him out. This wrath then must be at the end of the tribulation, over which he reigns.

*36. Then the king shall do according to his own will: he shall exalt and magnify himself above every god, shall speak blasphemies against the God of gods, and shall prosper till the **wrath** has been accomplished; for what has been determined shall be done.*

See Zephaniah 1:18. Yes, there are other verses, even in Revelation, that speak of wrath during the tribulation, and in local judgments over nations that have troubled Israel, and over Israel itself. But there is one **wrath** that tops them all.

*18. Neither their silver nor their gold shall be able to deliver them In the day of the LORD's **wrath**; but the whole land shall be devoured by the fire of His jealousy, For He will make speedy riddance of all those who dwell in the land.*

God's wrath is poured out in every generation, but a specific wrath is going to end it all. Matthew 3:7 announces ahead of time the thought of Paul here in Thessalonians 1.

*7. But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, "Brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from **the wrath to come**?"*

Notice in Romans 2:5 a particular day being singled out as awaiting unbelievers.

*5. But in accordance with your hardness and your impenitent heart you are treasuring up for yourself **wrath** in the day of **wrath** and revelation of the righteous judgment of God,*

Hebrews 3:11 refers to a pronouncement of God centuries earlier, obviously having nothing to do with us or the tribulation. So we say, yes, of course God has not appointed us to wrath *on Israel*, or wrath *on any of Israel's enemies*. And not the partial wrath experienced in the Tribulation. None of these are the final wrath of God.

*11. So I swore in My **wrath**, 'They shall not enter My rest.'*

No post-tribulation believer affirms that God is going to pour wrath on His own people. We are not appointed to wrath. But believers were alive when Israel was judged. When Edom or Philistia was judged. When Babylon was/is judged.

The fact that there are believers living during the time of God's wrathful dealings in the world, such as the bowl judgments, does not prove that God is somehow involving His own dear ones in this judgment. There have always been remnant people who escaped God's wrath when He poured it out selectively.

And when the world is so filled with evil that only a few remain that are His faithful followers, He will indeed catch them up to Himself as He is on His way to judge the earth. That is the meaning of 1 Thessalonians 5:9.

God has not appointed us to *the day of wrath*! God has not appointed us to the wrath to come!

**1 Thessalonians 5:12-28, a summary**

The letter ends with a series of practical rules for the people of God: recognizing authority, dealing with the needs of fellow-saints, personal worship, dealings with the things of the Spirit, warnings about falseness in church and personal life.

Then a closing prayer of his own followed by a request for prayer, and a command to be sure this letter is read to all.

Paul truly loved and cared for this assembly. But in spite of all he tried to do for them, they let down their guard and allowed the false teacher in. The falseness became such an issue, especially regarding the coming of Jesus, that he had to write them again about this subject.

Nevertheless, his Thessalonian writing on eschatology is some of the most helpful information we have on hand to combat the falseness of our own day.

## Second Thessalonians

### Why this letter?

Why do we have this second letter to the same church? The answer to that is in the first verses of chapter two, and reminds me of my post-college years, when I knew even more than the *everything* I had attained as a teenager.

Remember this one? *The Son has come, and you've been left behind.*

Familiar words? Larry Norman, 1969. The pre-tribulation rapture theory was being made popular in those days by song and movie and young people's theologian Hal Lindsay. It was all the rage.

But not necessarily all the truth.

The *Left Behind* series was the cinematic attempt, based on the book, to prove the pre-trib point. No less a Hollywood great than Nicholas Cage was eventually drawn into the series of films, that depicted antichrist attempting to explain to the world why the rapture had taken place. It imagined Christians who did not make the "cut" at the rapture, being left on earth to get their act together, fight the Lawless One, and finally suffer for Jesus before His second – or would that have been His third? – coming.

They get a second chance, in other words.

That second-chance motif in itself is a red flag for the pre-tribulation position. I am not aware, are you, of any teaching of Jesus about a *second chance*. Throughout the generations since Christ, the rule has been, "...it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment " (Hebrews 9:27), and "...between us and

you there is a great gulf fixed, so that those who want to go over from here [Paradise] to you [Hades torment] cannot...”

In other words, our future is fixed at death. One day the Son will come and the lost will indeed be ripe for judgment. The pre-tribulation rapture theory introduces a new concept to the eschatological collection, similar to the innovations of Rome with their “Purgatory.”

But it was a scene similar to this that was unfolding in the Thessalonian church, and Paul the apostle had to address it.

*1. Now, brethren, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, we ask you, 2. not to be soon 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. [kjb, “is at hand,” see below].*

Do you see it? Was the story circulating even then that Jesus had come! You’ve been *left behind!*

Not a mere movie this. The Thessalonians believed it from their heart. They knew their lives had not been up to par. They knew sin had overtaken them at times. Surely Paul – and that was the signature affixed to the phony letters circulating – would not deceive us. (But surely they had to wonder why Paul himself was still there, when they received this letter!)

‘Oh what do we do now!’ You can hear their excruciating cries going up to Heaven! “The Son has come! We have been left behind! Is it all over? Are we doomed?”

Calm down, says the apostle.

That “word from God” that someone spoke in your assembly. It wasn’t from God.

That forged letter. It wasn’t from me. I never said that! There are some things that must happen *before the day of Christ comes*. They hadn’t happened yet in Paul’s day. They haven’t happened yet.

This second chapter is the one that addresses the issue at hand. The coming of Jesus is referenced in chapter 1, but the details we seek to understand the fullness of the *mystery* Paul references are all in the second chapter. Then, chapter 3 changes the subject altogether.

So let’s take a close look at 2 Thessalonians 2. As with the first letter, we will summarize those parts that are not on the topic we are pursuing, and go into greater detail with the eschatology.

### **The main issue of 2 Thessalonians.**

#### **2 Thessalonians 1:3-12.**

3We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is fitting, because your faith grows exceedingly, and the love of every one of you all abounds toward each other, 4so that we ourselves boast of you among the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that you endure, 5which is manifest evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you also suffer; 6since it is a righteous thing with God to repay with tribulation those who trouble you, 7and to give you who are troubled rest with us **when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, 8in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. 9These shall be punished with everlasting**

*destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power, **10**when He comes, in that Day, to be glorified in His saints and to be admired among all those who believe, because our testimony among you was believed. **11**Therefore we also pray always for you that our God would count you worthy of this calling, and fulfill all the good pleasure of His goodness and the work of faith with power, **12**that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and you in Him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.*

The letter is once more signed up front by its three senders: Paul, Silas, and Timothy. After a standard greeting, Paul launches into the reason for his writing.

Verses 3-8 are one long Pauline-style sentence. The information we are tracking does not become obvious until well into the statement, but we need to look at it all to understand the depth of what Paul is saying.

Let me try to break the sentence down into digestible parts.

1. We are so thankful for your faithful progress in the Lord. So much so that we are always boasting about you.
2. You are going through much in the way of tribulation and persecution. Note here the use of the word *tribulation*. He freely admits that God's people are called to trouble. But of course, they are not called to wrath. One is not the other.
3. All of what is happening to you is from God. These people will give you trouble, you will therefore be worthy of the Kingdom, and God will give them trouble.

4. Let me assure you that when Jesus comes these trouble makers will experience God's judgment and vengeance. Be comforted. Endure a little while.

Verse 9 begins the new sentence, but continues the same subject matter.

Jesus is coming on a particular day (see below for discussion of the "Day of Christ" or above for the "Day of the Lord.")

#### **A secret meeting in the sky?**

Notice the nature of this day, per the Thessalonian letter. It is a day of judgment, but also a day when He will be glorified in His saints. This can be no other than the second coming of Jesus, and forms the context for the coming description in chapter 2. This is *not* a secret meeting in the sky seven years earlier.

Notice again:

*...when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, **in flaming fire taking vengeance** on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. **9** These shall be **punished with everlasting destruction** from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power...*

Certainly, our pre-tribulation brothers and sisters do not mean to suggest that all of the Thessalonian references to the coming of Christ are to some "secret" meeting. Surely this one would not meet that description!

## The coming of the Lord.

Notice how chapter 2 carries on the same theme, *concerning the coming of the Lord*. No division between chapters one and two need to occur.

How is the idea of the Lord's *coming* used in Thessalonians, and how elsewhere in the New Testament?

Matthew 24:27 is admitted by all to be the *final* coming, after the Tribulation.

*For as the lightning comes from the east and flashes to the west, so also will the **coming** of the Son of Man be.*

Likewise Matthew 24:30:

*Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man **coming** on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.*

Does Jesus change the subject here in Matthew 24:44 ? No, he is speaking of that same coming but now says we won't know exactly when it will happen, as people say today about an imminent "rapture" before the Tribulation.

*Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is **coming** at an hour you do not expect.*

1 Thessalonians 3:13 mentions a coming of the Lord. Are we forced to decide "which one" He is talking about, or does Paul not speak of the same one in both letters?

*...so that He may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the **coming** of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints.*

1 Thessalonians 4:15. Here we are asked to believe that suddenly Paul is not talking about the *final* coming, but one seven years earlier. Don't you think Paul, who was trying to comfort the believers, might have avoided confusing them, by using the word *coming* in two different ways?

*For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the **coming** of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep.*

1 Thessalonians 5:23. Which one, Paul? I mean, there are two, aren't there?

*Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the **coming** of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

2 Thessalonians 2:1. Pre or post, Paul?

*Now, brethren, concerning the **coming** of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, we ask you...*

2 Thessalonians 2:8. Certainly this one is following antichrist's rule, yes?

*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**.*

Revelation 1:7. In the clouds? Must be the rapture, right? Oh, but mourning? There'll be no mourning until He comes to judge, right? So which is it?

**Good news: no need to choose. The two are one. One coming. Only one.**

*Behold, He is **coming** with clouds, and every eye will see Him, even they who pierced Him. And all the tribes of the earth will mourn because of Him. Even so, Amen.*

Revelation 16:15. The thief warning. Must be before the Tribulation, yes? Oh no! This is in the middle of the *bowl judgments* towards the *end* of the Tribulation! What's it doing here? Answer: He hasn't come yet!

*"Behold, I am **coming** as a thief. Blessed is he who watches, and keeps his garments, lest he walk naked and they see his shame."*

Other verses of the New Testament speak of a coming of the Lord, not to mention the prophecies in the Old. None of them suggest that the coming is anything other than what the church has always taught, namely (Hebrews 9:28),

*...To those who eagerly wait for Him **He will appear a second time, apart from sin, for salvation...***

Sorry, no "third time" is promised.

Paul ends 2 Thessalonians 1 with prayer that the church will be worthy of its calling.

But he is not finished with his talking about the second coming. There follows some of the most important information the church has been given about that day.

## Before Jesus' return

### 2 Thessalonians 2:1-4.

***1**Now, brethren, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, we ask you, **2**not to be soon 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. **3**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, **4**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.*

Within these verses, when coupled with Daniel, John, and of course Jesus, is our history, written in advance. Are you just a bit curious to know what's coming?

### Paul's "order of events" for the coming of Jesus.

#### 2:1

*Now, brethren, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him...*

Notice the order of events in his description:

1. "The coming of our Lord Jesus Christ."
2. "Our gathering together to Him."

When one speaks to a believer in the pre-tribulation rapture today, it won't be long before he begins to show you the two *divisions* of the second coming. First, he will say, there is a "gathering to Him," a meeting in the sky, a catching up to glory, but no coming to earth by

Jesus just then. Second, he will go on, is the actual “coming of the Lord,” seven years later, what we all know of as the “second coming,” the two-thousand-year tradition of the Christian church that states simply that He will come *a second time*.

Interesting here is that Paul *reverses* that order, or more properly, *combines* both items into one event, for it was that one event that had the church worried: the Day of Christ’s coming. Paul seems not to care about this or that definition, this or that distinction, but the coming of the Lord, our blessed hope for all these centuries. He seems to mesh these events into one moment of history. It is the time-honored belief of the church that those two happenings, a gathering and a coming, do indeed take place at the same time.

But if we are being pressed to decide which of the “two events” is being spoken of in this passage, even in this letter, we must decide on the second coming, the final return of Jesus, based in part on the use of that word – coming – later in the passage (verse 8), but more so because those two events together describe the fullness of what will happen on that day, namely:

Jesus will (first) come down from Heaven. He will (second) gather His own to Himself. Matthew 24 spells this out perfectly: Jesus speaking,

***29***“Immediately ***after the tribulation*** of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. ***30***Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and ***they will see the Son of Man coming*** on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. ***31***And He will send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, ***and they will***

***gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.***

This is the only coming we should be expecting. How could we have believed so radically differently in the light of Scriptures that are so plain?

But, we are told, “Jesus was just talking to Jews here.” Honestly, this is a bit of a stretch, don’t you think? Yes, of course He was talking to Jews! Jesus nearly *always* spoke to Jews! But in this case He was talking to the foundation stones of the Christian church. Jews, yes. But the Messianic Jews. The foundation stones of the *church!*

**The rumor: the day of Christ...**

**2:2**

*...not to be soon 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.*

As mentioned above, the Thessalonians were frightened. Someone was circulating a deception about the Lord’s coming. Perhaps the Lord had already come? The Day of Christ had come and gone?

What is the “day of Christ”?

Is this term used elsewhere in Scripture? We spoke earlier of the “day of the Lord,” but what of “the day of Christ?”

Yes the term is used elsewhere. Several places, mostly by Paul. Notice the similarity in the passages I will quote, and perhaps you will reach with me the one conclusion that must be deduced: This time, unlike the oft-mentioned “Day of the Lord,” Paul is talking

about an *individual day*, the 24-hour *day* of the coming again of Jesus.

God will one day judge the world on an *appointed day*, says the same Paul on Mars Hill, being interrogated by the Areopagites (Acts 17:31).

*...because He has **set a day** on which He will judge the world in righteousness through a Man whom He has appointed...*

An appointed Man. An appointed Day. One Man. One Day. One return of Jesus Christ. The Thessalonians were being told perhaps that the Day had come and gone. Paul says, No. The Day, the one Day, is still ahead.

Here are some other Pauline passages in agreement:

Philippians 1:6...*being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until **the day of Jesus Christ...***

Philippians 1:10...*that you may approve the things that are excellent, that you may be sincere and without offense till **the day of Christ...***

Philippians 2:16...*holding fast the word of life, so that I may rejoice in **the day of Christ...***

1 Corinthians 1:8...*who will also confirm you to the end, that you may be blameless in **the day of our Lord Jesus Christ...***

1 Corinthians 3:13...*his workmanship will be evident, because **the Day** will bring it to light...*

2 Corinthians 1:14...*as you have already understood us in part, so that you may boast of us just as we will boast of you in **the day of our Lord Jesus...***

Paul sees **one day** coming in which God's work in us will be complete, when our work in other's lives will be vindicated.

And...

...*Paul's words match up with Jesus' teaching:*

See Luke 17:24,

...*for just as the lightning flashes and lights up the sky from one end to the other, so will be **the Son of Man in His day.***

His Day. The Day of Christ. One appointed Day.

Don't let this confuse you. The prophets saw a much longer day that only began with the day of which Paul speaks here. Days must have beginnings and ends. The "Day of Christ," which I maintain is a literal day as we know it, is the beginning of the "Day of the Lord," a *season* that stretches from that coming of Jesus all the way through the Millennium and then includes the day of Judgment, all of which is spoken of by the prophets.

**"had come" or "is at hand"?**

**2:2**

...*not to be soon shaken in mind or troubled, either by spirit or by word or by letter, as if from us, as though the day of Christ ...*

At the end of verse 2 of this second chapter is a group of words that needs a closer look. Should the English read "the day of Christ *had come*" or "the day of Christ is *at hand*" ? Actually neither translation

does full justice to the Greek in this case. The literal translation is, *is present*. That is,

*...as though the day of Christ **is present**...*

Were the fabricators saying that they were now living in the Millennium, as some say today? *The Day of Christ is present*. Or were they saying that Jesus could come at just any minute, as we also hear in the modern church? *The Day of Christ is at hand*. Were they saying, as is commonly thought, that Jesus had already come, and they had been left behind? *The Day of Christ has come (and gone)*.

All three notions are false. All three notions circulate still.

*This is the Millennium?* No

*Jesus could come at any minute?* For me, yes. For you, yes. But for the church...

*When Jesus comes, some [lukewarm] believers will be left behind to suffer?* Totally unheard-of concept in Scripture.

Paul puts all these notions to rest. No, church. Jesus will come on a certain day in the future, but not until two major historical items take place.

**Deception.**

**2:3**

*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...*

These first words, *Let no one deceive you*, should be on a bumper sticker, or a sign on our mirror, or a banner in our church. *Let no one deceive you!* Politicians, charlatans in the church, the media. The world and the church are crawling with deceitfulness. But the words still goes out to us and we must obey it. *Let no one deceive you!*

Notice also the following phrase: *by any means*. Circulars. Books. Sermons. A “word” in church. We expect some deceptions. Some are more disappointing than others. In the charismatic movement today, men and women can stand up in an assembly and say whatever is on their mind, and entire congregations must believe them if the speaker just adds on that *the Lord told them* to say this. That’s exactly what was happening in the Thessalonian church! Someone had given a “word” about this revelation. “Thus saith the Lord: I have come! I have taken my bride!”

No, we do not know the exact words of the fake prophecies, but we know it happened because we see the same shenanigans in our own time. In the 1830’s in Scotland an ailing young women gave out a “word” about a pre-tribulation rapture that was picked up by a charismatic preacher in London, passed on to Darby of the Darbyites (the Brethren) and from there, to Mr. Scofield and his annotated Bible, then to major Bible colleges, movies, books. Today it is believed as though the Bible itself had said it. But the Bible didn’t say it, and still doesn’t. Ms MacDonald, the young woman of Scotland, said it. Later she retracted some of her “prophecies.”

That’s how lies begin and spread. But *Let no one deceive you* is still the rule. No one.

### **The missing words. “...that day will not come...”**

Commentators are in agreement that this was simply a lapse in Paul’s writing. You will see italics in this verse. Italics indicate that the words are not in any Greek text. The meaning is clear, but Paul did not feel it necessary to place the words that every translation has supplied, namely “that day will not come.”

Here is the actual translation of the Greek *without* the italicized words you will find in most translations:

*Let no one deceive you by any means; for... unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition,*

All agree that the *Day of Christ* clearly will be preceded by an apostasy and a revelation of the antichrist. Let’s take a look at both.

### **About apostasy**

#### **2:3**

*... the falling away comes first...*

**Paul** says to Timothy that the Spirit has told him very definitely that “some shall depart from the faith” in the “latter times” ( 1 Timothy 4:1). He goes on to describe ahead of time, practices that have been a part of the Roman Catholic System for centuries, such as forbidding to marry, commanding not to eat meat, etc.

Some gather from this that the apostasy could well have begun hundreds of years ago, and is meant to get worse.

He repeats this warning to the same person in his second letter to him (3:1 ff), speaking of “perilous times” in the “last days.” Here, the world seems to be included in his description, and again we can

see historically and in the present time how all of this may have come to pass.

In that same chapter of second Timothy, Paul says that *“evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived” (Verse 13).*

This revelation of coming rebellion is mentioned again by Paul in the 4<sup>th</sup> chapter of second Timothy. The apostle cannot say enough about what is coming.

## **2 Timothy 4**

***3**For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; **4**and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables.*

Though this description fits many ages of church history, it certainly meshes with the end time apostasy warnings.

**Jesus** speaks in Matthew 24 of false prophets and false Christs who will attempt to deceive even the elect, if such a thing were possible. Certainly, this too is a part of that great falling away.

The falling away, or departure from faith, or apostasy, when it is in full bloom runs side by side with the Tribulation. The Tribulation feeds even more apostasy as greater numbers of nominal Christians succumb to the pressure that antichrist will place on the church.

And the growing apostasy in turn feeds the anger of God and brings even more judgment on the earth.

The Tribulation causes apostasy. The apostasy causes Tribulation. Two streams flowing into the river of judgment on unbelief. False

Christs and prophets of peace arise, miraculous signs abound. The true church is minimalized then nearly brought to extinction.

For now, revivals may come, and unreached nations shall have their time of ingathering, but the trend of civilization is a downward one. The only bright spot in our future is the coming again of Christ.

Is it not true that an apostasy, a falling away from all that is truthful or good or holy, certainly has taken place in our world and is not finished yet?

The Greek here in our text, verse 3, is *apostasia*. It means a turning away, or a rebellion, an abandonment. It is used in reference to *forsaking* the law of Moses in Acts 21:21...

*...but they [ Jewish zealots ] have been informed about you [Paul] that you teach all the Jews who are among the Gentiles **to forsake Moses**, saying that they ought not to circumcise their children nor to walk according to the customs...*

Paul was being accused of leading Jews into *apostasy* against Moses. In our Thessalonian text, Paul speaks of a similar apostasy yet to come, presumably against Christ, or the ways of God in general.

In fact, a definite article precedes *apostasia* in the Greek, which shows up in nearly every English translation of the Bible except the KJV. Paul predicts **the apostasy**. **The rebellion**. **The falling away**.

It would seem that just as the coming tribulation spoken of by Jesus and Paul and John and Daniel is an *unprecedented* time period, so the build up to this awful time will also be unheard of in history. This will be the greatest *falling away* of all time, the perfect environment for one known as the man of *lawlessness*.

So a world-wide, church-wide rebellion against the words of God has come and is, and is growing, and *must* precede the coming of Jesus. It must also precede the rise of antichrist, and therefore it is not in itself something to be determinative in our search for the end times and the coming of Christ. As I have indicated, apostasies have come throughout our history.

But *the* apostasy has not.

In like manner, the other signal of the coming of Christ, namely the coming of antichrist, is also a bit difficult to discern, for, as apostasies, there have been many antichrists!

But not *the* antichrist. We must be careful to read descriptions of both apostasy and antichrist to be sure we are close to the very end. And these things have been made, I believe, difficult for discernment so that only the people who care the most and try the most to understand, will understand.

#### **The antichrist's description.**

#### **2:3-4**

*...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...*

There are two sons of perdition, or destruction, or “loss”, spoken of in Scripture. Jesus identifies Judas as one who is cut off, severed permanently, as the word implies, in His prayer of John 17.

And now Paul, when speaking of the one who will one day sit in the Temple of God and proclaim his own deity, refers to him with the same terminology. The majority of the translators have agreed on

this Greek word here rendered *perdition*. Eternal loss is clearly ascribed to these two men.

How could both Jesus and Paul refer to two different men as *the* son of perdition? It seems to me that as Jesus was speaking in the first century there was only Judas who filled the description properly, at least on earth. Now that he is gone, Paul tells us of another who is identified as such. There is only one son of perdition at a time on the planet.

My own research into the Scriptures eliminates the possibility that, as some have speculated, Judas and the antichrist might be the same person.

So, where does Paul get his information about a man of sin? Jesus revealed much of it directly. And Daniel, that we are assured was a prophet familiar to the apostle, spoke of these things also. Chapters 7, 8, and 11 of Daniel offer much biographical matter regarding the coming man of sin.

There are actually many terms applied to this final betrayer and opposer of the Lord Jesus Christ. In this Thessalonian chapter alone, he is called the *man of sin* (2:3), the *son of perdition* (2:3), and the *lawless one* (2:8).

In Daniel he is the *little horn* (7:24), the king of *fierce countenance* (8:23), and the *willful king* (11:36).

John rounds out the identification by calling him the *antichrist* in 1 John 2:18, and the *beast* in Revelation 13:1ff.

As the purpose of this book is not to describe this evil one, I will not be able to explain why all these different titles necessarily point to the same person, but suffice it to say that the descriptions

surrounding all the above passages make it plain that one man is being described.

**A literal man.**

*...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.*

It is a man, not a system we are talking about. One known from the foundation of the world, the absolute perfection of evil, the challenger to the Throne of God. Here will be his last attempt at unseating the Deity. Satan, inside of a man that has been prepared for the task.

He will be a literal man sitting in a literal Temple, a building even now being planned by erstwhile Jews who will be confident they have finally done away with the Christian myth.

Jerusalem, the center of the world since David, will be hailed as his own center, as he tries to duplicate everything holy while being lawless himself. Much more could be said of him, but this is not the thrust of this present topic.

My focus now is, *who is restraining this beast?*

How is he being kept *even now* from world domination? Surely the enemy of our souls has great authority given him by the Lord. Why not kick it up a notch and take over?

All in good time. All in good time. At the appointed time, and not before, he shall be released.

*But someone or something is restraining him. Who? What?*

## The Restrainer

### 2 Thessalonians 2:5-8

*5Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you these things? 6And now you know what is restraining, that he may be revealed in his own time. 7For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only He who now restrains will do so until He is taken out of the way. 8And 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.*

#### What the Thessalonians knew.

##### 2:5

*Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you these things?*

What things, Paul? What did you tell them? Well, the things in the preceding verses:

- The day of Christ will not come unless an apostasy comes first.
- The day of Christ will not come unless the antichrist is revealed.
- The man of sin is the son of perdition.
- The man of sin will sit in the Temple of God and show Himself to be God.

And how did Paul know all of this? Daniel. The Holy Spirit. His trip to Heaven. Paul was not an outsider in the mysteries. John was not the only one to be taken to Heaven and given predictions about the end times.

2:6

**Of course they knew!**

*And **now you know** what is restraining, that he may be revealed in his own time.*

Now they knew? They knew what/who is restraining? But they didn't know this before? When did they get the information?

Could it be that Paul is simply saying that the information *he just gave them* is what they now know? I told you this, this, and this. I told you about this man of sin, but I never tied this in to the fact that it will take a while for all of this to take place.

*And now you know that someone is holding things back.*

You mean, the man of sin himself is the restrainer? You mean, his overcoming of the world with evil is what must precede the overcoming of the world with righteousness?

Hear it again. Paraphrasing Paul:

*"When I was with you I told you all of the above about the man of sin. Now I am telling you again about him, to show you why Christ has not come yet. The man of sin must come first, and his **not coming** is what is restraining the coming of Jesus. So now you know who is restraining..."*

The text flows properly now, doesn't it? Surely we in this age would not be kept from a revelation that the Thessalonians were given. Surely we would not be tantalized and confused about a word given to a first century church to which we were not privy? Hear it again:

*I told you then and I tell you now about this man of sin... **and now you know** the one who is restraining!*

I know this is shocking to some, when all these years the interpretation has circulated that the restrainer is the Holy Spirit. But the text does not say that, does it? The words of Paul seem to go back into the chapter and refer to the waiting for Satan's work as the reason for the delay, the restraint. In other words, Paul is doing nothing more than repeating what he said in verse 3, that that day of Christ will not come until the man of sin comes first.

## **2:7**

### **Mysteries.**

*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*

There are many mysteries unveiled in your New Testament.

There is the mystery of the kingdom of God, revealed by Jesus to His disciples via parables.

Blindness has come upon Israel in our present day until "the fullness of the Gentiles" is ushered into the kingdom. Paul calls this a mystery in Romans 11:25.

The preaching of the Gospel is a mystery unveiled, Romans 16:25, Ephesians 6:19, as well as other teachings of the apostle Paul, 1 Corinthians 2:7.

The fact that some shall not die, but shall rise up to be with the Lord when He comes, was a mystery revealed to the same apostle. 1 Corinthians 15:51.

The Gentiles are to be fellow-heirs with the Jews. A true eye-opening mystery revealed to Paul. Ephesians 3:3.

The union of Christ with His church as in a marriage is a mystery. Ephesians 5:32.

“Christ in you” is a mystery. Colossians 1:26-27. Namely, that God

*“was manifested in the flesh, Justified in the Spirit, Seen by angels, Preached among the Gentiles, Believed on in the world, Received up in glory.”* This is a mystery! 1 Timothy 3:16.

There is the mystery known as *Babylon* in Revelation 17.

### **17:7**

*7. But the angel said to me, “Why did you marvel? I will tell you the **mystery** of the woman and of the beast that carries her, which has the seven heads and the ten horns.”*

Our passage now speaks of a hidden truth revealed first to Paul, we believe, as were most of these other secrets. Namely, there is a long-term plan of Satan to send to earth a man who will, inspired by Satan, filled with Satan, directed by Satan, attempt to control the earth and defeat Messiah.

This mystery was already working in the first century. But someone even then was holding things back. When he is commanded to move, the final drama of earth on this side of the Millennium will take place.

I therefore must differ with those who keep proudly proclaiming that the return of Jesus (seven years before the return of Jesus!) is the next thing on God’s prophetic calendar.

Paul must differ also. He received the unveiling of this mystery and has passed it down to us via the Thessalonians.

### Is the restrainer a “who” or a “what”?

You will find both words used in verses 6 and 7.

Verse 6: *And now you know **what** is restraining...*

Verse 7: ***He who** now restrains...*

The restraining *power* [what] of a *person* [who] is the restrainer. This is a single person, not a group. Knowing that, limits our choices, thankfully.

The only persons that could be involved must be either Divine, as in the Spirit, or demonic, as in Satan, or human, as in antichrist, or angelic. One single person.

This rules out, does it not, the entire church of the Lord Jesus being the restrainer ? Could the church be thought of as a “He”? And it rules out human government being the restrainer, does it not?

We are looking for a *person* that is going to be *taken out of the way*. That is the terminology, isn’t it? I believe the identity of that person is in the text before us.

### The capital “H”.

The NKJV people, along with those at the NASB, are confident that “He” should be capitalized. He, meaning *the Spirit*. But capitalized letters are interpretations. They are never part of the translation. We will see whether the translators are in error by assigning a capital here. In fact these are the only two – the NKJV and the NASB – of the forty-plus translations listed on Bible Hub that have interpreted things this way.

### Some past views about the restrainer.

While speaking of various options for the restrainer here, let's take a look at what commentators of the past have said:

#### Ellicott.

*How this potentate would "disappear out of our midst" St. Paul gives no hint; but obviously not by death: for, unless the power itself was to disappear with him, his successor would equally be "he that now withholdeth." We may therefore say that the prophecy would be satisfied if "he that withholdeth" proved to be **a whole succession of persons**;*

Translating our key word as *withholdeth* instead of *restrains*, Mr. Ellicott suggests that the restrainer might be **a succession of persons**.

Oh my. That could lead us on a merry chase for sure. Methinks the answer is a bit simpler.

#### Benson .

Benson quotes Mr. McKnight in saying,

*For the **power of the emperors and of the magistrates** under them, first in the heathen state of the empire, and afterward when the empire became Christian, was that which restrained the man of sin, or corrupt clergy, from exalting themselves above all that is called God, or an object of worship civil and religious.*

Benson's answer: The Roman Empire kept the man of sin, namely the Roman Popes and Priests, from being revealed. Interesting. Now the "He, who" is an entire Empire!

**Barnes** and others are in agreement . Are we getting any closer to a clear explanation of these words of Paul?

Matthew **Poole** says the restrainer is Rome, pagan and papal. So does **Gill**.

Others weave a tangled tale. Still others do not even venture a guess. It becomes obvious that there is not a settled opinion in our tradition. We need to examine this matter more thoroughly.

**The old English word “let” .**

*For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work, but the one who now restrains it will continue until he is taken out of the way.*

For those who are using the King James text, a word of explanation. Some KJV words have only *changed* their meaning, but the old English “let” has *reversed in meaning* altogether. *He who now letteth will let* has got to raise some eyebrows of people seeking a better understanding of all of this.

Today if a child asks his mother to “let” him go out and play, he means “allow.” But old English “let” means just the opposite. It is the word that the NKJV and most others have changed to “restrain.” Not allow, but *prohibit*.

Just so you know. Now, about those commentators again.

**Commentators today .**

While some want to continue to cling to the idea that Rome and Popes are *antichrist*, and that human governments are the *restrainer*, over the last decades a new theory has emerged, based on the idea that the church will be taken out of here when Jesus appears in the sky and brings them to heaven for seven years while

incredible evil will take place on earth. Though nowhere stated in these words, the idea has spread throughout the free world like wildfire.

The bound world, the so-called third world, the downtrodden church knows better. They know that tribulation is the very way God's people enter into the Kingdom. They are not seeking an escape but striving to be faithful in the midst of it all.

Trying to make sense of the passage before us, the pre-tribulation people have capitalized the "He" and assumed that, since the church is taken out of the world, the Spirit in that church goes with them. No Holy Spirit, or a limited amount, can only mean no restraining power over evil, and the antichrist is given free reign.

One problem with that theory is the notion that God can be "taken out of the way," as the text reads. Using God's activities in a passive sense is troublesome. Will God take God out of the way? Will Jesus take God out of the way?

Ignored, for the most part, is the presence throughout the book of Revelation, of a holy people of God who are slowly extinguished by antichrist. They do not go home by rapture, but rather by annihilation and slaughter.

How do holy people, as the name given to the believers, saints, implies, become holy and remain holy, if the Holy Spirit has been removed from the earth? With what power do the two witnesses minister?

Why would the presence of the people of God be considered a restraining force? If the Holy Spirit in the church is a restraining force, how is it that antichrist is promised victory over them, and indeed given that victory? And how is it that nation after nation

turns away from God in our time, though the church has been in those nations for centuries?

Please consider these “saints” passages of Revelation:

8:4. Here are praying saints: *And the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, ascended before God from the angel's hand.*

13:7. Saints overcome by antichrist: *It was granted to him to make war with the saints and to overcome them. And authority was given him over every tribe, tongue, and nation.*

No need to call these folks a special breed of holy people. They are the church. The church is referred to by the term saints quite often in the New Testament. There was no need to create a new denomination here...These are our people.

I believe I can say with authority, *the Spirit-filled church is not the restrainer*. The restrainer is a person. One person. That much is clear. Let's dig deeper to find who that person is.

### **Restrainers in the Bible.**

I believe God often uses **angels** to do His restraining work in the world.

Consider the angels who worked with the Lord in restraining the judgment of God on Sodom until Lot could be safe.

Or the angel who destroyed and then restrained from destroying when David was being disciplined.

Or the angel who destroyed an entire Assyrian army, keeping them from harming Judah.

Of course angels receive their commands from above, but they are indeed the means of restraining.

**A special restrainer.**

There is a particular restraining angel to which I would draw your attention. Look at Revelation 9:1 in your Bible.

*Then the fifth angel sounded: And I saw a star fallen from heaven to the earth. To him was given the key to the bottomless pit.*

At first glance one wants to believe this is a holy angel guarding an unholy place. But reading on in the chapter, we find that this angel who guards the Bottomless Pit, the Abyss, is called Abaddon or Apollyon. I have never been convinced that this is another name for Satan. Satan is busy on the planet at the time this one is revealed. But he is certainly under Satan's employ, albeit ultimately under God's authority.

He is one of many "stars" that fall from heaven, mentioned elsewhere as one third of the angels who rebel and are cast out.

In this chapter, *Apollyon* is given a *key* to the pit, as it were, and is allowed to release to the earth a horde of locusts.

More to the point: In Revelation 17 we find that the Bottomless Pit is where the *man of sin* has been hiding all these years. At the appointed time, John tells us, he will be released from that pit and come to the earth and do his work.

Revelation 17:8. *The beast that you saw was, and is not, **and will ascend out of the bottomless pit** and go to perdition. And those who dwell on the earth will marvel, whose names are not written in the Book of Life from the foundation of the world, when they see the beast that was, and is not, and yet is.*

Does that not harmonize with what Paul is telling us in 2 Thessalonians? At a certain time, *the one who is restraining will stop restraining*, be taken out of the way, and allow antichrist (the beast of this passage) to come onto the planet to work his evils.

Do you see it? A wicked angel, some say Satan himself, is assigned to guard the prisoners of the pit. At a signal from powers above him, he steps aside and the man of sin is allowed to appear in a series of miracles that will cause the world to wonder. This is what Paul saw also. I jump ahead to verse 9 in our text for a moment:

**2:9**

*The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders,*

This is a resurrected king of the past, per Revelation 17. He will need to prove who he is by the miracles he will be allowed to perform.

**When the guard is removed.**

Again **2:7**

*For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work, but the one who now restrains it will continue until he is taken out of the way.*

The teaching goes that it is God the Holy Spirit Who is restraining the world from going deep into sin and serving under an antichrist. That Spirit is in the church, so the church must be taken out.

Doesn't work. Not for me.

It is not necessary for a universal evacuation to take place for evil to take hold. Look at the United Kingdom. Look at all of Europe. Look at America. Once bastions of the Christian faith. Though it is true

that the absence of Christian influence via the Bible and the true church has brought these people down, it is not because they were raptured out. It is because *they fell away*. It is the falling away, not the catching away, that brings on the antichrist eventually.

Verse 8 will help us now.

**2:8**

*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.*

Then? When? When the guard is taken away from the pit. The punishment referred to here is not immediate, but following the years of the Tribulation that comes the days following his appearance.

A comforting message to the church. Though the man of sin will arise, he will be defeated by the coming of Christ.

And to whom was this Thessalonian letter addressed? "Tribulation saints"? No. *Just the church at Thessalonica*. The Bible knows no class of people known as "Tribulation Saints" any more than it knows of "World War 2 Saints" or "Ukrainian Saints" or "Major Earthquake" saints.

And no, no matter how bad it gets, I say to saints of every age, the Son has not come. *You have not been left behind.*

## The antichrist's manifestation

### 2 Thessalonians 2:9-12.

*[9](#)The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders, [10](#)and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved. [11](#)And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie, [12](#)that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.*

Our world is even now being prepared for the false Messiah but the ultimate demise of Satan. Fake news. Phony elections. The push toward a one-world government. Lies in all the media. Good men being set aside. Evil men taking their place. Injustice. Lawlessness. The world is in chaos and will soon need someone to lead it out of its quagmire.

That person, I do believe, is waiting to return to the planet. He is one chosen of God to fulfill a role in the end times. He was here before, and began a treacherous career against Israel. He will return, resurrected as the Lord whom he will mimic, filled with energy from Satan himself.

This is the mystery of iniquity, meshed together with the mystery called Babylon. It is soon to come to an awful climax. The subterranean forces of hell are holding back their man, that the Lord has allowed to remain alive for this very purpose. Like Elijah has been sustained for millennia, so this one will not be allowed to perish until it is his own appointed time.

Soon hell will be told, let him go! And he will be thrust back onto the world scene. Many of God's people will then go to their

rewards, not, as they vainly imagine now, by a special coming of the Lord that they can nowhere find in Scripture, but by a bloodbath of the evil one. The enemy will not be able to touch the Jewish elect, and so, angry, Satan's man will go after God's New Covenant people (Revelation 12:13-17). And they will not be able to escape, or "bind" him, or "cast him out" or speak positive messages. They will go down, some to torment, some to beheading, some to crucifixion. By any means necessary, they will die.

Let us be ready. He who now restrains this madman will continue to restrain him until he is taken out of the way and the antichrist arrives.

### **Thessalonians' ending, a summary**

#### **2 Thessalonians 2:13-3:18.**

Paul closes this discussion (chapter 2) on an upbeat tone, reminding the Thessalonians of their call from God and encouraging them to stand fast and be comforted through it all.

He then (chapter 3) asks for prayer and that he and they may be delivered from evil men. There follows a serious injunction against laziness, offering himself as an example of the opposite.

Next "do not grow weary in doing good." And a warning to stay clear of those who do not obey Paul's words in this letter.

And finally a benediction and Paul's signature.

All in all, an excellent pair of letters that have blessed the people of God for centuries.

## Why is this so important?

Let me explain why it may be very important for this matter to be settled in peoples' hearts now.

If my findings line up with God's truth throughout Scripture, and Jesus is not coming until after antichrist has done his worst on the planet, I can imagine a scenario like this:

Things get worse and worse. Worldwide poverty and war loom on the horizon. People are afraid. Where is Jesus?

A miraculous rising of a man in the Middle East and his subsequent overpowering of governments through diplomacy, causes yet others to grow concerned. Where is Jesus?

Bibles are banned. Christians are targeted. The persecution we have only read about, that took place always "over there" is now *here*. Why didn't Jesus come back and rescue us from all this?

Then it will dawn on them: Jesus never rescued these other countries either. They were in poverty. They were persecuted, beaten, imprisoned, killed. No escape was possible for them. Why did we think the rules would change for us?

As they become aware of the delusion under which they had spent so much of their Christian life, they see now that there really was a price to being a Christian. And finally they count the cost. And some bail out.

Some are angry at the church that deceived them and gave them false hope. They want nothing to do with the church. Maybe the church is lying to them now. Maybe the Bible isn't true either. Maybe...

Will false doctrine today lead to the very apostasy we have discussed, tomorrow?

I understand the doctrine of the elect. I know the elect will persevere. But is it appropriate to bring even the elect through this painful shock, when they could have been at least mentally prepared for what was coming?

Is not persecution promised to the people of God? Isn't it through *much tribulation* that we enter the Kingdom? Acts 14:22, Paul's missionary team was

*...strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith, and saying, "We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God."*

Did you know that the majority of Christians, looked at as a whole, do not believe in a pre-tribulation rapture, and that it is the Western evangelical church that has grabbed this theory?

In other words, free people believe in, and want to hang on to, their freedom. We cherish our liberty and we believe we will just automatically have it always.

But is that promised?

**How close are we to the coming of Christ, based on the letters to the Thessalonians?**

Many generations have seen the end of the world around the corner. Mine is no different. But consider these things:

The descriptions of Paul, as well as other writers of Scripture, demand for the end, a New World Order. In this realm, worldwide unity will be insisted upon, and one man will rise to the top of the

system. National identity will be replaced by a loyalty to the man in charge of all, whom nearly everyone will love and worship.

For this all to take place, there must be a world lulled into a total dependence on the government and its head. Even in the worst of times they will be saying "Peace and Safety." Dependence on local governments will be shattered as local governments fall, one by one.

The world will be in nearly total darkness. This necessitates a total falling-away from the faith by choice, or pressure from the man of sin, or brainwashing by taking the "chip" into the brain.

There must be a famine of the Word of God. Biblical ignorance is indeed pronounced in our generation, but it will get much worse. Bibles will be outlawed worldwide, not just in persecuted lands. Teaching the Scriptures in any form will be banned. Christianity will be a thing of the past, as in Europe today.

Walking in darkness, the people of earth will be easily deluded by superpowers, and individuals that rise up and deceive by miraculous manifestations.

Sin, or lawlessness, will multiply exponentially, and the only desire of the peoples of earth will be for financial security and prosperity, which the Man of Sin will provide until he can't provide it any longer.

Yes, we see all of this in our day in a measured amount. But we have seen nothing yet. The trends of modern society will increase. How fast is uncertain. But they will increase. Every political division of the world will eventually evolve into the picture painted for us by the Word of God. Every jot and tittle will be fulfilled, though we do not understand it all now.

And Paul says that the day of Christ will not come unless all of the preceding is in place. A New World Order, a Man of Sin, a falling away, a total rebellion of a planet gone mad.

Jesus could come for you or me today. Let us not take the message of Scripture lightly once we have seen that certain things must come first. Your life can end in this second. Be ready. Be watching.

But be not in shock if you see antichrist rise before you, and Jesus has not come. Then will the letters to the Thessalonians be of comfort to you.

Oh, and it will be helpful if we commit these Biblical things to memory. The Book may soon be unavailable.

**How to get ready for “the next event on God’s calendar.”**

Yes, that is what they call it. The very next thing that God is planning to do is rapture the church so that it escapes the coming Trouble, they say.

Sorry, but there is no serious evidence in Scripture for such a claim.

Prophetically it would seem that following the apostle Paul is a wiser course than following the teacher Darby, or the Bible salesman Scofield, or the movie script writer LaHaye and others who have passed on the teaching of the Scottish seer of 1830.

If indeed the antichrist-led rebellion and apostasy and resultant Tribulation are next – and no one can prove that even *they* are that imminent – what are we to do to prepare? I believe that preparation for this horrendous time is the same as preparation for all evils that can come upon us individually or nationally.

Look what Peter says after describing the “end of all things.”

(1 Peter 4:7, 2 Peter 3:11) *...therefore be serious and watchful in your prayers... what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness...*

This was the same advice Jesus gave to His disciples, *Watch!*

I read nothing of storing up goods and money just in case... Jim Bakker and company have overlooked the fact that antichrist's government, like all the godless governments of our own day, can easily rob the storage facilities of these "prepared people."

It is not shortages we fear, it is governments. Joseph in Egypt turned shortage into a system that saved a world. But Antichrist will be on a crusade to destroy all that is of God. Will their packaged and frozen foods be safe from such a tyrant? I think not.

How did the North Korean Christians prepare for this time in their history? How can one prepare for a family as evil as the Kims? The only possible preparation is the preparation of the heart! The determination to watch! A life lived in holiness!

## That blessed hope.

It's mentioned in Titus 2:13,

*...looking for **the blessed hope** and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ...*

Those who believe in the pre-tribulation rapture may assume that those of us who do not share their beliefs are without a true hope. They suggest that all we can hope for is the antichrist, and that is not a "blessed hope."

But the rise of antichrist before our eyes will bring us great joy, as we will now know that the coming of Jesus is only a few years away. Even then, "no one knows the day or the hour."

And imagine how wonderful and blessed is this hope to one suffering in the chaotic world of the man of sin. It could well be that this verse was written for such as him. Those who suffer under Kim Jong Un and Xi, and the rulers of Islam, look to the hope for Jesus' coming but may well not receive the manifestation of it.

How many have hoped in Christ, but have had to go on to glory without seeing His return.

Did not Abraham and the other patriarchs see a time when the promises would be fulfilled, and thus walk in hope toward that day, though afar off? Hebrews 11:13 tells us that...

*...these all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.*

This hope, this blessed hope, is set before us as we labor on for Jesus here. The context of the Titus passage is the long-term training of God's people as they deny the world, and live a holy life, zealous of good works. Always before us is the fact that Jesus will come back *some day*, or, more likely, that He will appear to us *individually* as we leave the planet by death.

If indeed Jesus meant to say He could come at any moment, how many would buckle down and live a serious life here?

Just for the record, this writer has that blessed hope, and sees no contradiction between the knowledge of a coming antichrist and the equal knowledge of a coming Christ. We have been trained to believe that it is through many tribulations that we enter the Kingdom, and this hope, even though delayed, demands our waiting upon it with patient endurance, as saints for two thousand years have done.

Even so come, Lord Jesus... when it is your perfect time.

**Other eschatology books by Bob Faulkner:**

*Hackberry Chronicles, Volume I, containing:*

1. *The last Message of Daniel.*
2. *Caught Up, But When?*
3. *The Kingdom Handbook.*
4. *Who Is the Antichrist?*
5. *Things That Shall Surely Come.*
6. *Who Comes First, Christ or Antichrist?*
7. *Coming Our Way.*
8. *There Are Seven Kings.*

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2. *The Seventy Sevens of Gabriel.*
3. *The Greater Reset.*
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2. *No Millennium? Really?*
3. *Let Your Kingdom Come.*
4. *Imminence.*

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