

## Message #7

## II Thessalonians 2:3-8

Every now and then there are hunting programs or programs about men who live in the mountains that they show on TV and it gets my heart beating with memories that I have of the years we spent hunting elk on the Idaho and Wyoming side of the Tetons.

Every year I would take the time to sight in my 300 H & H Magnum. It didn't matter how many times I did this, I did it every year. I would sight the gun in to hit 2 ½ - 3 inches high at 100 yards. I knew the ballistics of my 180 grain bullet and I knew this would put me dead on at 300 yards. I knew exactly how much that bullet would drop from 100 to 400 yards. As far as humanly possible, my knowledge was very precise and as a result, we were able to harvest many elk.

No matter what you do, the fact is the more precise knowledge you have, the better your chances of succeeding. If you are going to build something, you need precise knowledge as to how to do it. If you are going to fix something, you need precise knowledge as to how to fix it. This is not only true in things we do physically but this is also true biblically and spiritually.

If we are going to be stable in our faith, we need precise knowledge of the Bible and if we are not going to be shaken in our faith, we need very precise and very accurate knowledge of doctrine, especially a doctrine like biblical prophecy.

Paul had a love for this Thessalonian church and one of the reasons why is that they had a love for the Scriptures. Apparently, Paul had never seen a group of people so committed to understanding the Scriptures. They viewed Paul's teaching as the Word of God and not the word of men.

One of the subjects Paul had taught them about was the subject of the Rapture of the Church. He taught them that the Lord Jesus would end the Church Age by rapturing the Church (I Thess. 4:13-18). But some faulty teachers had surfaced who didn't know what they were talking about and they were teaching that the Thessalonians were in the Tribulation, that is, "the day of the Lord" had already begun (II Thess. 2:2). In all reality, they were teaching the Thessalonians that there was no Rapture or they had missed the Rapture because they were in the Tribulation.

Now many people throughout Church history have been confused about this very point. There are confused teachers who still are fuzzy about the prophecy of Paul. There are teachings and writings that are very confusing. Paul had specifically taught the Thessalonians that the Lord would Rapture the Church before the time of wrath (I Thess. 1:10; 5:9). Yet false teachers and some false letter was floating around saying that the believers were in the Tribulation.

**KNOWING THE SPECIFIC DETAILS AND PRECISE ORDER OF PROPHETIC EVENTS PERTAINING TO THE DAY OF THE LORD IS THE KEY TO NOT BEING QUICKLY SHAKEN IN YOUR FAITH CONCERNING THE PRE-TRIBULATION RAPTURE AND THE TRIBULATION.**

As we study the Bible, it is clear that “the day of the Lord” has nothing to do with the Rapture. It refers to a time period that includes the Tribulation, the Second Coming, the Millennium and the Great White Throne Judgment (Ps. 2:9; Is. 11:1-12,13; Joel 2; Amos 5:18; Zeph. 3:14-20; Rev. 6-20). This will be a time when God destroys the God-mocking nations and blesses Israel.

It is obvious from the end of **verse 2**, that the Thessalonians were not in the time period known as “the day of the Lord.” Paul was so intent upon the Thessalonians knowing this point that he said there are three main events that have not occurred that will occur when the Tribulation is underway:

**EVENT #1** – There will first come a worldwide apostasy. **2:3a**

This will be a major worldwide event. The noun “apostasy” (*αποστασια*) refers to a falling away to a defection or revolt. This specific word was used in biblical times in reference to some political revolt. In the N.T. it is always used in regard to a religious defection or falling away (G. Abbott-Smith, *Greek Lexicon*, p. 55). In fact, in Acts 21:21 the word was used in regard to Paul’s teaching of grace which was viewed as a defection from the Judaistic teaching of the Law. Now this word does not simply mean not believing what is true or right, this word refers to a very worldwide aggressive revolt against God and His Truth.

Now the big question is what is the defection or revolt or rebellion that must occur when the day of the Lord can come?

Now the specific doctrinal defection that I think Paul is referring to here is a universal defection from true grace/faith system as it relates to Jesus Christ. There will be a major worldwide rebellion and anti-God movement that will specifically move people away from the truth about Jesus Christ and against the truth that He is the only Savior who can save from sin. The religious world and political will go into a worldwide rebellion against the truth of the grace system which teaches that man may only be saved from his sin by faith alone in Christ alone.

Just as in our life time, there were worldwide Billy Graham crusades that preached truth about Jesus Christ, so in the Tribulation there will likely be worldwide anti-Jesus Christ crusades that will proclaim and aggressively promote an anti-God movement.

Paul specifically spoke of this in I Timothy 4:1-3. He predicted that as the Church Age neared its conclusion that there would be a major departure from the true faith system to a demonic works system. The day of the Lord cannot come until there has been a complete global departure from the grace faith system.

This complete departure from the grace faith system cannot occur as long as we are here because as long as we are here we will promote and proclaim it.

Furthermore, the revolt or rebellion will include a physical killing of any believer in Jesus Christ. The political world will sanction the killing of any believer.

We know from Revelation 6:9-11 that when this revolt occurs, there will be many martyrs who will be literally killed and executed for their faith. This will all be part of this worldwide rebellion.

Now there is no doubt that, to a certain degree, religious apostasy is already here in this world and it is, as Dr. Walvoord said, “surging in strength and intensity” (*1 & 2 Thessalonians*, p. 123). However, there are still believers and churches that herald the truth. When the day of the Lord comes, the Church will be gone. All the believers who heralded truth are gone.

All that will be left here on earth will be false religion and unsaved politicians. They will group together to form an all out revolt against God and His Son Jesus Christ. This is one reason why we may know we are not in the Tribulation.

**EVENT #2** – There will next come a man of lawlessness. **2:3b-4**

Another reason why the Church cannot possibly be in the day of the Lord time period or in the Tribulation is because the day of the Lord features a political leader who is called “the man of lawlessness.” This will be a man who will appear who will be completely lawless, which means he will be subject to no law. He will be a worldwide atheistic dictator who will demand that he be worshipped as God.

In our study of the Antichrist, we discover that Daniel revealed a total of 52 facts about this man. **The reason why Daniel reveals so much about him is because he has no connection to the church, but he has a big connection to Israel.** When the Tribulation (Day of the Lord) begins, this man will make a covenant with Israel, but he will break it three and a half years later (Dan. 9:27). He will go on a rampage against Israel and this is why Daniel reveals so much about him.

Paul wanted the Church to know that they will never see this man. He gives five descriptions of him:

**(Description #1)** - He is a lawless man completely given to lawlessness. **2:3a**

He will not be subject to any law. Daniel says that he will actually “make alterations in times and law” (Dan. 7:25). Daniel also predicts he will “cause deceit to succeed by his influence” (Dan. 8:25). This will be a very evil man, the likes the world has never seen before.

Now when a political leader becomes lawless today, even the unsaved world takes note of it. For example, when President Al-Assad of Syria used chemical weapons on his own people, most of the world said this is wrong. When this man surfaces and does things like that, the world will applaud him. Lawless, evil, wicked things will be approved and led by this man of lawlessness.

**(Description #2)** - He is the son of destruction. **2:3b**

Again Daniel predicts this man will be a beast who will chew people up with his iron teeth and trample and crush them with his feet (Dan. 7:7).

Daniel says he will be unusually destructive—“destroy to an extraordinary degree” (Dan. 8:24). He will be a man who worships war (Dan. 11:38).

**(Description #3)** - He is opposed to every form of god or object of worship. **2:4a**

The word “oppose” (αντικειμαι) is one that means to actually resist or withstand or be opposite of something (G. Abbott-Smith, *Greek Lexicon*, p. 41). This man will stand against all religion. Most today say all religions are good. This man will be totally and completely opposite of all religion. He will be the ultimate atheist and he will be worshipped for it.

Daniel predicts that this man will blatantly speak out against God (Dan. 7:25). He will speak out against God’s Word and God’s people. According to Daniel 11:37, he has no regard for any religion. In fact, Daniel specifically says, “he will show no regard for the gods of his fathers.” This evil political man must have been raised to respect all religions, but he will oppose all of them.

**(Description #4)** - He exalts himself above every form of god or object of worship. **2:4b**

The word “exalt” (υπεραιρω) is one that speaks of lifting yourself or raising yourself not only above other humans, but above God (*Ibid.*, p. 457). Daniel says this one will make arrogant boasts. Paul reveals that he will actually call himself god.

Now have you ever seen a political leader who actually says he is above all gods? No, and that is the point. We will not see it because we won’t be here to see it.

**(Description #5)** - He sits in the temple of God saying and displaying that he is God. **2:4c**

This is critical because in order for him to sit in the Temple and say he is God, the Temple must be in existence, which it is not today. This moment was referred to by Jesus as the “abomination of desolation” (Matt. 24:15) which was predicted by Daniel the prophet (Dan. 9:27). According to Revelation 13:13 he will be able to perform miraculous sign miracles even making fire to come down out of heaven.

Now have you ever seen a person so evil that would be worshipped by everyone in the world? No. This has not happened in the Church Age ever and it will not happen while the Church is still here. This is precisely Paul’s point. The Church is not in the day of the Lord period because a key feature of the day of the Lord is this evil Antichrist, which no one in the Church Age will ever see. But during the Tribulation this man will exist.

Now Paul says in **verse 5**, don’t you remember when I was with you I taught you these things. Paul says I carefully explained this to you, but you are getting all confused.

It is critical that we know doctrine. It is critical that we know precise prophecy. Prophetic truth is vital truth and God wants His Church to specifically know it is not going into the Tribulation.

**EVENT #3 – The restrainer will be removed. 2:6-8**

Now one more reason why the Church cannot possibly be in the Tribulation is because when the day of the Lord actually comes, “the restrainer will be removed” and evil will break loose at a worldwide epic level.

Presently, there is a restrainer that is preventing the worldwide apostasy and the man of sin from being revealed. This restrainer is preventing evil from breaking loose far worse than what we are seeing today.

It is more than just interesting that the noun “restrainer” is described by a neuter article and noun “what” or “it” (το κατεχον) in **verse 6** and then is also described by the masculine article and noun “he” (ο κατεχων) in **verse 7**. So the restrainer is a real person and yet also a real personal force or power that is able to restrain apostasy and this man of sin from being revealed.

Now there have been all kinds of opinions as to whom or what this restrainer is: 1) Roman Empire; 2) Roman Emperor; 3) God; 4) Antichrist; 5) Satan; 6) Human government; 7) Michael the archangel. But the truth is none of these fit what Paul is saying here.

**When we carefully analyze the Upper Room discourse of Jesus Christ, He specifically uses the neuter and the masculine to refer to the Holy Spirit (John 14:26; 15:26; 16:13, 14). When we turn back to Genesis 6:3, what we learn is that it is God’s Spirit that “strives” with man.**

So what Paul is saying here is that you know that you cannot be in the Tribulation because the Holy Spirit is still operative and is still preventing the full apostasy from breaking loose and the Antichrist from being revealed and He will continue to do so until He is taken out of the way. When will that happen? At the Rapture of the Church!

So Paul is saying you don’t need to be worried about going into the Day of the Lord with all of its events because you will be taken out of the way, via the Rapture when the Holy Spirit is removed.

Donald Grey Barnhouse said the answer to the question as to what is keeping the Antichrist from putting in his appearance on the world stage is “you are.” “You and every other member of the body of Christ on earth. The presence of the Church of Jesus Christ is the restraining force that refuses to allow the man of lawlessness to be revealed. True, it is the Holy Spirit who is the real restrainer. But as both I Corinthians 3:16 and 6:19 teach, the Holy Spirit indwells ever believer.

The believers’ body is the temple of the Spirit of God. Put all believers together then, with the Holy Spirit indwelling each of us, and you have a formidable restraining force.”

At the Rapture of the Church, all believers will be removed and that will release the world to sin and apostasy as never before. At that moment all truth, light and good will be gone.

Dr. Chuck Swindoll said this time will be like the zoo cages that are all opened and so that all evil runs wild and rampant and no evil will be restrained in any way (*Steadfast Christianity*, p. 25).

The program of God for the present time and the future time may be broken down into three separate ages that all begin with words that start with the letter "R."

- 1) The Church Age is the Age of Grace, which is the age of restraint, which ends at the Rapture.
- 2) The Tribulation, after the Church Age, is the age of rebellion and retribution which will end with Christ's return (His second coming).
- 3) The Millennium, after the Tribulation and return of Jesus Christ, is the age that features the revelation of Jesus Christ and His literal worldwide reign.

Dr. John Walvoord said when you pour through the Thessalonian epistles, there are at least seven reasons why we must believe in the pre-Tribulation Rapture: (*Ibid.*, p. 132).

- 1) Because the Rapture is presented as an imminent event that could occur at any moment without any specific signs (I Thess. 1:10).
- 2) Because believers are specifically promised to be delivered from anything that has to do with the wrath of God (I Thess. 1:10; 5:9). The Tribulation is a terrible time of wrath.
- 3) Because the chronological order of events that Paul presents gives the Rapture first before the day of the Lord. (I Thess. 4:13-18 and 5:1-9).
- 4) Because the prophetic truth pertaining to the Rapture is to bring comfort and encouragement to the Church, not scary, threatening news that they are going into a horrific Tribulation (I Thess. 4:18).
- 5) Because believers are specifically omitted from the day of the Lord information by the pronouns "they" "them" "those" (I Thess. 5:1-7), but they are included by the pronouns "we" in data pertaining to the Rapture (I Thess. 4:13-18).
- 6) Because the reaction of the Thessalonians to the false teaching that the day of the Lord had come, informs us it was not based on what Paul had taught them (II Thess. 2:2).
- 7) Because the restraining ministry of the Holy Spirit is still operative and will be until the Church is raptured and He is the restrainer who prevents the apostasy and man of sin from being revealed, which are key elements of the Tribulation.

Now we believe we are rapidly nearing the Rapture of the Church and one thing is clear, you do not want to miss it. You do not want to be left behind when this event happens. **The key to being raptured and not experiencing God's wrath is that you believe totally and only in Jesus Christ to save you from your sins.**