

53 – 2 Thessalonians: “Day of the LORD,” and the “day of Christ”

- It is likely that 2 Thessalonians was **written shortly after 1 Thessalonians**, probably no more than a year later, to address some of the same issues (the return of Jesus for the Church). This new group of believers needed some clarification on this theme. The first letter may have prompted some confusion, so Paul wrote again. There is also indication that a letter or statement from someone else had deceived them and caused their confusion (see next note). Date of writing probably in early 50’s AD.

- False teachers had probably told them that Jesus had already come for the church** (*the “day of Christ” as opposed to the “day of the LORD”*), and that the persecutions the Thessalonians were suffering were part of the Tribulation. Paul had apparently taught them they would be delivered from that. Obviously, that would be a cause for concern if they were still there! Paul allays their fears by indicating that our “gathering together unto Him” is still in the future. It was then, and it still is now. Paul lays out a sort of event sequence for the end of days. These are very important scriptures to understanding the end times. This church’s suffering was not “the Tribulation” but the very real ongoing persecution of believers in those times, which continues today in many parts of the earth.



- This is a short book with only 3 chapters, but contains some **very important information about the end times, and the events surrounding the second coming of Jesus Christ**. This is a doctrine of Christianity that is critical for us to understand, so more time is devoted in this lesson to this subject, than has previously been given to other books in these lessons.
- The Thessalonians also apparently believed Jesus was coming very soon, so soon that **they may have been neglecting their earthly business**. The doctrine of imminent return suggests that Jesus can come any time, but we are not to just sit around, quit our jobs and wait for it. He has work for us to do here, and we do not know when He is coming. We are to “occupy until He comes.” (Luke 19:13) The Greek word used there for “occupy” is *pragmateuomai*, which is literally to “busy oneself” in a pragmatic and practical way. In other words, to live fully and normally, doing His work, until Jesus comes back for us.

Highlights

Ch 1	Greetings, thanks for them, 1-2, standing fast in the midst of persecution, they will be glorified when Jesus returns, 3-10; prayer for them “the name of our Lord Jesus Christ” to be glorified in them, 11-12
Ch 2	Instruction about timing of the gathering of the Church, the falling away, revealing of the “son of perdition” and events before the second coming of Jesus and encouragement not to be troubled, 1-12; thankfulness of their choice of salvation and sanctification through the Spirit, encouragement to stand fast, 13-15; another prayer for their comfort, 16-17
Ch 3	Paul requests their prayers for spreading of the Word and deliverance from evil men, 1-2; reminder that God is faithful and will guard them, 3; Paul’s confidence in God’s ability to keep them and prayer that He will show them love and patience, 4-5; encouragement to continue living productive lives, working for what they have and not being lazy or idle, cites himself as an example, 6-15; prayer for peace, a note about Paul’s writing in his own hand, 16-18

- We learn here that the **church is going to fall into total apostasy in the end times**. This is in line with what Jesus spoke of in his address to the disciples about their questions regarding the end times. In Luke, He asks: “*...when the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?*” (18:8) In the original Greek, this question is phrased in such a way that it needs a negative answer. In other words, the answer to His question is NO, God will not find true faith on earth when He comes again. The church will be in complete apostasy (*abandonment or renunciation of spiritual truth*) as Paul indicates here.

- We also see this falling away in the book of Revelation. There will be a “form of godliness” but no real power. Paul states in Timothy the same thing: *“But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away!”* (2 Timothy 3:1-5) In this letter to the Thessalonians, Paul adds to this thought a sequence of events in the last days that is important for us to know.

- The first letter to the Thessalonians emphasized the return of Jesus for his Church, what we have labeled the Rapture of the Church. This second letter has **more of an emphasis on the sequence of events culminating in the second coming of Jesus** (a different event). There is a gap in time between these two events, according to Paul’s instruction here. In the second chapter of this second letter, Paul gives us a very precise explanation of these events: *“Now, brethren, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, we ask you, 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. 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, 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. Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you these things? And now you know what is restraining, that he may be revealed in his own time. 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. 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. The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders, and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie, that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.”* (2:1-12) There is a sequence given here for the return of Jesus.



RAPTURE: “THE DAY OF CHRIST”
(gathering, removal of the Church)

RETURN: AFTER THE “DAY OF THE LORD”
(second coming of Jesus to earth)



- This letter makes a distinction **between the “day of the LORD” and the “day of Christ.”** Paul calls the coming of Jesus for the Church the “day of Christ” (our “gathering together to Him, or the Rapture). He tells us that this day will not come until (a very important word in scripture!) the “falling away” comes first. The falling away is the complete abandonment of truth, or the apostasy of the church. Then he goes on to say that after this the “man of sin” is revealed (the son of perdition, or the evil end times ruler fueled by the enemy) and he exalts himself above God (see Isaiah 14:12-15). Paul reminds them that he taught them these things already. The “day of the LORD” is something entirely different than the “day of Christ.” The “day of the LORD” is referenced repeatedly throughout the Old Testament as a terrible day, a day of God’s wrath. Most interpreters believe this will be the time of the Tribulation, and will begin only AFTER “the day of Christ,” according to Paul’s statements in this letter.

- He goes on to add that something or someone is restraining all these events in the present time. He says *“He who now restrains will do so until He is taken out of the way.”* (2:7) The One who is doing this restraining is not clearly identified. *(We do know it is a person, not a “thing,” by the construction in the original Greek.)* However, how is evil restrained? Man, on his own, cannot do it. Only God can restrain evil. His presence on the earth today is in the form of His Holy Spirit dwelling in the hearts of believers. That is what, and WHO restrains total evil. The Holy Spirit is the apparent “restrainer” and must be “taken out of the way” before the end time events can continue. Since God will not remove His Holy Spirit from us, He must take us, the spiritual Temple, as well. **It would seem that the Church and the Holy Spirit will be removed, taken out of the way, together.** Only after this time can the rest of these events proceed. This is one of many scriptures used as arguments for the interpretation of a “pre-Tribulation” rapture. However, while the Rapture itself is a very sound Biblically-based truth, the timing is still debatable and often a point of controversy. We should not allow differences in our opinions to divide us. We can all agree that Jesus is indeed returning for us, at the moment He has pre-determined as perfect for His plan. He will be faithful to us regardless of the timing of this event.
- We know that the **Holy Spirit must be present in order for people to come to Jesus, so He will be present on earth at this time**, but not in the same way as He is now, in the indwelling presence of believers. He will be present, but not to restrain evil and not to indwell believers. His work will be to draw people to Jesus, and salvation through Him. It will be much like it was in the Old Testament, where the Holy Spirit did not indwell believers, but empowered them and anointed them for special ministries. The indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit is a unique form for this unique time, the times of the Gentiles and the times of the Church, part of that “mystery of God” that Paul spoke of in Ephesians.
- According to how Paul presents them here, **the sequence and events** are seen as follows:
 - The falling away (apostasy) of the Church
 - Removal of the Church and the Holy Spirit
 - The “man of sin” (final evil world ruler) revealed
 - This “son of perdition” exalts himself above God and will sit in the Temple proclaiming himself as God *(this is one reason many believe that the physical Temple in Jerusalem will be rebuilt before the end times, since it would seem it would have to be there in order for these, and other, verses to be fulfilled precisely, as God always does)*
 - This “lawless one” will have the power of Satan, and will deceive many with signs and wonders
 - The ones who will be deceived will “perish” because they chose to believe the evil ruler, and not God. These are described as people who have pleasure in sin. Because of their choice, God sends them a grand “delusion” to believe the lie. *(We must understand that God does not want to do this, and desires that “none should perish.” He does not want to judge those against Him, but He must. Sin must be obliterated before our eternal future with Him. These people have been given plenty of opportunity, like so many people today, to accept the free gift of His Son. They have made their choice, and God knows they will not repent and turn to Him, so they are handed over to the evil one.)*
 - The evil ruler will be *“...consume[d] with the breath of His mouth and destroy[ed] with the brightness of His coming.”* In other words, Jesus will destroy the evil one when He returns (His second coming).
- These letters to the Thessalonians also serve another purpose: to underscore the fact that believers do not study prophecy to predict events, but to know the authentication of God who wrote them and fulfills them, and also to know His character and to become more like him. In other words, like one commentator stated, it is **not about calendar, but character** (*Wiersbe*). Anyone who sets dates is outside of His plan and His will. We are to be strengthened by these things, not glued to a calendar date which is always wrong when man predicts. The Thessalonian church had been duped by someone who had apparently told them the rapture had already occurred. Paul reminds them of things he had already taught them. Other things had to happen first, and would happen after, but that isn’t the most important thing. The real message of his letters to them is to “stand fast” no matter what is happening, to not fall for false teachings, and not deviate from the truth of God’s Word, even in the midst of persecution and suffering.

- A note about the term “Antichrist:”** Nowhere in all of scripture is the “man of lawlessness” or the “son of perdition” referenced as the Antichrist, but that is what we have called him over the years. This term does not appear in the book of Revelation, or the books of Daniel or Zechariah, all of which have plenty to say about this person. This evil final world ruler is called by many names in scripture. The word “antichrist” comes from John’s letters (1 John 2:18-23; 4:3, and 2 John 1:7), *“Little children, it is the last hour; and as you have heard that the Antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come, by which we know that it is the last hour. They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us. But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and you know all things. I have not written to you because you do not know the truth, but because you know it, and that no lie is of the truth. Who is a liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist who denies the Father and the Son. Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father either; he who acknowledges the Son has the Father also.”* (1 John 2:18-23) Paul says that *anyone* who denies that Jesus is the Messiah is *an* antichrist. In 4:3 of the same letter, John says there is a “spirit of antichrist” already at work in the world. He says the same in 2 John 1:7, that all who deceive and do not confess that Jesus was the Messiah, the anointed One of God, in the flesh, is an antichrist. Both Paul and John knew about this evil one, and knew he would reject Jesus, and deceive others. Only John referenced him as “Antichrist” which is the name that has stuck down through the ages and in various Bible commentaries. But John makes it clear that ANYONE who denies Jesus is AN antichrist. It is also important to know that this word has a dual meaning. It not only means one *against* Christ, but also one who *sits in place of* Christ, or a *substitution*. This little clue can have great meaning in understanding end times and who this evil person will be. NO one, ordained of the church or not, can sit in substitution for Jesus. NO ONE. Something to think about: the term “vicar” literally means a *substitute*, someone with the same authority, and someone who “stands in for” someone else (it’s where we get our word “vicarious”). This is getting into very dangerous territory when we understand that NO ONE can substitute, stand in for, or have the same authority as Jesus.
- The gathering of the Church by Jesus, and His Second Coming, appear to be two distinctly separate events. We are including here a brief comment about this and table which contains passages that reference these events in separate ways. There are no prophecies that must take place BEFORE the Church is gathered (except the apostasy, or falling away of the Church, which is already happening all around us). There are many things, however, that must happen before He returns to earth in the “second coming.” We are thankful to Chuck Missler for his detailed study and work on this subject. These comments and this table belong to him. You can go to his website (<http://khouse.org>) and read many interesting articles on these subjects. Just type the word “rapture” into the search box and you will be given the option of many excellent and well-researched articles. This is presented here to assist in your understanding of these grand end time events. **COMMENTARY: “In contrast to the imminent gathering of His church, there are numerous passages that deal with precedent events which must transpire prior to the “Second Coming” to establish His kingdom on the earth. Some of the passages referring to the Rapture and the Second Coming are summarized at the table below.”** (Missler)

Rapture	Second Coming	1 Thess 1:10	Mark 13:14-27	Titus 2:13	2 Peter 3:1-14
John 14:1-3	Dan 2:44-45	1 Thess 2:19	Mark 14:62	Heb 9:28	Jude 14-15
Rom 8:19	Dan 7:9-14	1 Thess 4:13-18	Luke 21:25-28	James 5:7-9	Rev 1:7
1 Cor 1:7-8	Dan 12:1-3	1 Thess 5:9	Acts 1:9-11	1 Peter 1:7, 13	Rev 19:11-20:6
1 Cor 15:1-53	Zech 14:1-15	1 Thess 5:23	Acts 3:19-21	1 John 2:28-3:2	Rev 22:7, 12, 20
1 Cor 16:22	Matt 13:41	2 Thess 2:1, 3(?)	1 Thess 3:13	Jude 21	
Phil 3:20-21	Matt 24:15-31	1 Tim 6:14	2 Thess 1:6-10	Rev 2:25	
Col 3:4	Matt 26:64	2 Tim 4:1	2 Thess 2:8	Rev 3:10	