

The Day of the Lord

2 Thessalonians 2:1-10

2 Thessalonians 2:1-10 - *“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.”*

Background Notes

In Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians, he differentiated between the Rapture and the Day of the Lord. Both events have to do with the return of the Lord, but they are not identical. The Rapture is the return of the Lord for His Church - all believers - and that event was covered in the second half of 1 Thessalonians 4. The Day of the Lord is the events surrounding the return of the Lord to this earth to set up His glorious kingdom, and that was covered in 1 Thessalonians 5.

The Rapture is called a *mystery* in 1 Corinthians 15. In the Bible, a *mystery* is a doctrine that was not revealed in the Old Testament, and was only brought to light in the New Testament. The Rapture was called a *mystery* – but the future Day of the Lord, on the other hand, was definitely **not** a *mystery*. The Day of the Lord was **clearly** revealed in the Old Testament, and our Lord Himself elaborated on it in His Olivet Discourse. The Day of the Lord includes the coming Tribulation period, the return of the Lord to this earth in judgment, and the time of our Lord's glorious kingdom here on this earth.

The Rapture could occur at any time! It is imminent. There are no prophetic signs that must be fulfilled before the Lord returns to “catch up” or “rapture” His Church home to Heaven. On the other hand, various prophetic signs are associated with the Day of the Lord. So the Day of the Lord cannot come unless the associated signs are also present – and that was exactly Paul's argument in this chapter.

The Thessalonian believers were undergoing persecution and trials (chapter 1). Paul had taught them that troubles and tribulations were associated with the Day of the Lord, so some of the believers had incorrectly concluded that maybe the Day of the Lord was already beginning.

Furthermore, from verse 2, it appears that the believers had received some false teaching, some false prophecies, and even a false letter that was written as if by the apostle Paul. These things all backed up the false notion that the Day of the Lord had already begun.

So here in chapter 2, Paul corrected this misunderstanding and misrepresentation. He began by saying, "*in view of the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him...*" "*Our gathering together to Him*" - that's the Rapture!

So, Paul explained - don't be deceived. The Rapture - "*our gathering together to Him*" - must take place before the Day of the Lord. Don't be shaken in mind and heart, and don't be troubled, no matter who says that the Day of the Lord has already come. It has **not** come. It is **not** present.

Not only must the Rapture come first, but certain "signs" are associated with the Day of the Lord - and those signs are not present yet. What signs? Three signs were given: the coming of apostasy (falling away from the truth), the revealing of the "man of sin" and the removal of the "Restrainer." These signs are our three doctrinal points.

Doctrinal Points

1. The Day of the Lord cannot come before "the apostasy" is present.

Verse 3: "*Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first.*"

Apostasy is a turning away, or falling away, from truth once held. It's a renunciation and abandonment of the faith. There has been apostasy and there have been apostates down through Church history, but 2 Thessalonians 2 is speaking about a **great** falling from the truth and from the faith once held. This great apostasy will affect all of Christendom. The apostle Paul taught the Thessalonian believers that this great apostasy must be present at the time of the Day of the Lord. Thus, because this great rebellion and falling away of the faith had not yet taken place, the Day of the Lord had not yet come.

Although there have been (and continue to be) plenty of heresies and departures from the truth since the days of the early Church, there still has not been a **wholesale** renunciation and abandonment of the Christian faith within Christendom. But that time will come at some time in the future - and it may be not too far in the future. Christendom will totally reject the essentials of the Christian faith, and Christendom will worship a man who proclaims himself to be God (v4). This is the antichrist.

What will trigger this great apostasy, or this great falling away from the truth? I think there can be no doubt that the trigger will be the Rapture. At the Rapture, all true believers will leave this earth - but apostate "Christendom" will remain. There will still be churches - but they will be apostate churches. When the true believers leave this scene, there will be nothing left but but apostasy.

This, I believe, is another strong argument in favor of the pre-Tribulation Rapture position. The Day of the Lord cannot come before this **great apostasy** is present.

2. The Day of the Lord cannot come before "the man of sin" is revealed.

Verses 3-4: *"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."*

Who is this "man of sin?" We believe he is the antichrist of Revelation 13. This coming antichrist will only be a man, but he will proclaim himself to be God. Notice (v3) that "the man of sin" was also called the "son of perdition," or completely given over to the influence of Satan. The same term was used to describe Judas Iscariot.

Verse 4 indicates that this future antichrist will set himself up in the rebuilt Temple in Jerusalem to show that he is God. On the basis of Revelation 13, we believe that he will set up an idolatrous image in the Temple and force everyone to worship that image. According to Revelation 13:15, the antichrist will be able to give life-like characteristics to this image – and that will be just a part of the deceptive "signs and wonders" that are mentioned in verses 9-10: *"The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonder, and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish."*

"The man of sin" will be destroyed when the Lord returns to this earth in power and glory, so his days of power will be short-lived. *"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"(v8).*

Is this future antichrist alive today? We don't know. What we know for sure is that the Day of the Lord cannot come before "the man of sin" is revealed.

3. The Day of the Lord cannot come before "the Restrainer" is removed.

Verse 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."*

What or who is “the Restrainer”? Various suggestions have been made, including human government, but we believe that “He who now restrains” lawlessness (v7) is the Holy Spirit. At the present time, the Holy Spirit is restraining lawlessness and the revealing of the man of sin.

How is the Holy Spirit restraining evil in this world today? He is at work through the **true Church**, which is composed of **all true believers**. The Holy Spirit indwells the Church as a whole (1 Corinthians 3:16), and the Holy Spirit indwells each and every **true** believer (1 Corinthians 6:19). At the present time, Christians are the salt of the earth. Like salt, they are slowing down the spread of moral decay and corruption.

However, Christians will be leaving this earth at the Rapture. At the time of the Rapture the Holy Spirit, as the Restrainer of lawlessness, will depart when His “dwelling” - all true believers - will be caught up from this earth. The Holy Spirit came to indwell believers and the Church on earth at Pentecost, and the Holy Spirit will leave this earth with the all true believers at the Rapture. Then, according to our Lord, tribulation like the world has never seen will be unleashed upon the earth (Matthew 24:21).

Obviously, the Holy Spirit, as the third person of the Trinity, will continue to be omnipresent after the Rapture. And believers will come out of the Tribulation period of the Day of the Lord. But as the Restrainer of lawlessness, the Holy Spirit will be taken away when the Church is caught up to meet the Lord at the time of the Rapture.

So Paul’s point is obvious: the Restrainer is still here. The Day of the Lord cannot come before the Restrainer is removed.

Practical Application

You’re never too young to study prophecy!

We’ve studied some heavy prophetic truth in this chapter. Maybe you think this kind of truth is too heavy for young believers - but the apostle Paul didn’t think so!

The Thessalonian believers were young in the faith. Remember what 1 Thessalonians 1:9 said? *“You turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God.”* Many of them were only a few months old in the Lord, and many of them came from non-biblical backgrounds.

But Paul didn’t take the attitude that new believers can’t handle heavy doctrine, or that they can’t handle prophecy. And neither should we!

Don’t overemphasize prophecy - but don’t shy away from it, either. You’re never too young to study prophecy!