

Second Thessalonians Chapter 2

[New King James Version of the Scriptures used unless otherwise stated.]

Introduction and Background

To help us understand the Bible it is important to have some understanding of the background and the reason for the Holy Spirit to move the hearts of its writers. In Acts 17 vv.1-10 we read about the visit Paul made to Thessalonica. It seems that Paul was there for at least three weeks as he visited the synagogue on three Sabbaths to preach Christ from the scriptures to the Jews and Greeks. He taught and explained to them that “Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead”, and proclaimed, “This Jesus whom I preach to you is the Christ.” Many were persuaded to become Christians and a great crowd of devout Greeks and leading women joined Paul and Silas. The Jewish leaders were envious of the crowds who had come to Christ, and they arrested Jason who Paul and Silas had been staying with. The local Christians took Paul and Silas out of the city for their personal safety, and Paul left to travel to Berea, from Berea to Athens, then soon afterwards to Corinth (Acts 17:11 – 18:1).

The letters to the Thessalonians were probably among the first letters Paul wrote to the churches. The letters were written from Corinth not long after Paul had arrived there. The date of writing was around the early A.D. 50's. Timothy, a young man and Paul's trusted fellow worker in the work of the Lord, had been sent back from Athens to Thessalonica to encourage the new believers. Later, when Timothy arrived in Corinth, he reported to Paul that their faith, love, and hope was evident as they grew in the Christian faith. Timothy also made Paul aware of men who were teaching wrong doctrine which was disturbing the new converts. The wrong doctrine was concerning the order of the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. There was also evidence of a forged letter supposedly written by the Apostle Paul, which was further shaking the faith of the believers. The new converts had heard the teaching of Paul and they had a great affection and respect for him. Paul in turn had a great affection for them, so he was troubled by this. In the second letter he addresses this wrong doctrine head on.

In the first letter Paul addresses the first part of Lord's return to rapture the Church, to gather all believers in Him. This is the next event in God's calendar, and it will take place before the years of tribulation that will sweep across this world. 1 Thessalonians 4 vv.16-18.

“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. 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. Therefore comfort one another with these words.”

It is a great comfort to Christians from every age to know with assurance that they will be taken from the world before this terrible time of tribulation comes. This rapture will be a private event and only those who have put their faith and trust in the Lord Jesus will be taken. The world at large will not see this happening, but of course, they will see that millions have gone missing.

In the second letter Paul explains the events that will take place after the Rapture, but prior to the

Lord coming with His saints. Every believer, dead and alive, will be in heaven after having been raptured out of this world. Seven years of tribulation will then come upon this world. The first three and a half years will be somewhat bearable, but the second three and a half will be utterly awful. It will be the worst period of suffering that the world has ever known. At the end of the seven years the Lord will come again. Not as He did before to take His saints for blessing, but in judgement. This event is called the Appearing. The Lord will appear in the heavens with all His believers and every eye will see Him. He will come to defeat and destroy His enemies. He was last seen and known in this world as “Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews.” In that day He will be rightfully proclaimed as King of kings and Lord of lords.

Paul assures the new converts that there was no need for concern because God has everything under His control and in perfect order. He tells them not to be deceived, shaken in mind or troubled by the words that the wicked men had spoken, or written in the forged letter that they had received. The coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering to Him had not taken place: they had not missed this event. Paul then details the reasons why he was so sure about it. Paul had been instructed by the Lord as to the order of events that will take place. For us today we are blessed that we can read the Bible which, when read as a whole, helps us to understand these events more fully.

Indications of the coming Day of the Lord

In verse 3 of chapter 2, Paul tells the believers that “the falling away comes first.” This falling away is the same as in 2 Timothy 3 where it speaks about “perilous times” and lists many things which will surface from people’s hearts and cause moral deterioration in this world. We see so many of these things in people today, but generally there is civil law and order in most countries and some respect for the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. In the last days there will be significant evidence of a turning away from God. “Falling away” is really apostasy, which is the act of people, who say, they say they are Christians, deliberately rejecting the truth of the Bible in relation to the Deity of Jesus Christ and the redemption through His atoning and redeeming sacrifice. People will profess to be Christians, but their way of life will betray them. Jeremiah 17 vv.9-10 reminds us of the human heart,

“The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it? I, the LORD, search the heart, I test the mind, even to give every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his doings.”

Paul continues in verse 3 to tell the believers that along with the falling away, “the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition.” The man of sin as he is described here is the same person as described in verse 8, “the lawless one.” He is also called the beast or the antichrist in other scriptures. The man who will be revealed is energised by Satan. Satan has had various guises over the world’s history, one being an angel of light, but here he will be like a roaring lion. All restraint that he had will be removed. This man will oppose anything that is remotely God’s, and he will go further, even to exalt himself above God. He will sit on the throne in the temple in Jerusalem and he will demand to be worshipped. He will imitate God. People will follow him: they will believe his lies and everything that is false. The man will have the power of Satan and he will perform miracles and do such amazing things that people will be drawn to him.

As we progress down the chapter, we learn more about the activities of this man. He will use unrighteous and wicked deception on all, even people who are already perishing. Why are they perishing? It is because they refused to believe in the truth of the gospel and be saved. Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 1 v.18,

“For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.”

God has been so gracious in His offer of salvation to men and women, but they continue to reject Him, and they go further and believe in the false lies of Satan. Just to be clear here that perishing does not mean annihilation: all unsaved mankind will face God’s judgement one day, and be

sentenced to an eternity away from God in the torture of Hell.

No wonder that the believers in Thessalonica were very concerned that they could have missed the coming of the Lord. The time of the Day of the Lord begins, as we have said already, after the believers are removed from this world. The Bible speaks about Christians as being Salt and Light in this world, Matthew 5 vv.13-16. Salt is a preservative, it gives flavour, and light chases darkness away. Christians in the world make a huge difference. Many charities and institutions have been started by Christians. Therefore, we must be true to our salvation, and be upright, and just in all our actions and deeds. Christians reflect Christ in a dark and evil world, and this helps to restrain evil.

Once believers have been taken the One who restrains will also leave this scene. The One who restrains is the Holy Spirit. He is the Comforter who was sent among us when the Lord ascended back into heaven. The Holy Spirit's work is in every believer's heart, making Christ known and guiding us in truth and righteousness. He also convicts the world of sin, righteousness and judgement to come. The Holy Spirit's work restrains the evil in the world. When He is taken from this world the moral conditions will deteriorate rapidly. I always thought that the Holy Spirit would leave the world when the believers do at the Rapture. However, on consideration of this passage, there is evidence to suggest that His presence will continue, but in a different way. What we do know is that His work will not be through the Church (which is the whole body of Christians living today). We cannot be sure what His work will be, but what we are sure about is that the world will feel the tide of evil that He has been restraining.

I mentioned earlier that God has everything under His control, nothing will surprise Him. Satan will be allowed free work among mankind, but only for a time. The Lord will appear with His saints in all glory and power when He will finally crush His enemies under His feet. If you read verse 8 and read Revelation 19 you will learn in more detail the way the Lord takes control. The end for the man of sin is when the Lord consumes him with the breath of His mouth. In Revelation it speaks of a sharp sword coming from His mouth. It appeals to me that the Lord will just need to open His mouth and the lawless one is destroyed. The sheer brightness of His coming is enough to defeat those under the control of Satan. What a day that will be when the world once more sees Jesus! The same Jesus who they rejected and put to death on the cross of Calvary. Every eye shall see Him, and they will try to hide from the brightness of His glory and majesty. The Lord comes in judgement, awful judgement: judgement that is deserving to a world that is engulfed in sin.

Paul taught the believers at Thessalonica that they would not be here during the terrible Day of the Lord. They would be with Him as He comes in judgement and then blessing. It is important for believers today not to be shaken by false doctrine: there is plenty of it about today. Whatever you hear proclaimed as truth, check it out. Always go back to your Bible and see what the Bible teaches. This way you can't go wrong. The Bible is the true Word of God. Satan uses many ways to discourage and destabilise believers and false teaching is one of them.

Paul's encouragement to the Thessalonian new converts

From verses 13-17, Paul encourages and gives assurance to the believers. He gives thanks to God for them every day. Paul loved and cared for these people. Paul also reminded them that they are dearly loved, in a special way, by the Lord. He also reminds them that they have been chosen for salvation and brought to blessing by the Holy Spirit to believe in the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ. They are set apart for Christ, the One who loves them and gave Himself for them. I like the way Paul shows his love and care for the brethren in Thessalonica. As believers this is something we can all do today: encourage and look out for one and another. We all need encouragement at times, especially pastors, workers, and leaders in the Lord's service. Another thing that is good for us as Christians is to be constantly reminded of God's love for us, and how special we are to the Lord. When you go back and consider the cost of your salvation then you begin to appreciate the depths that the Lord took as He died for you to redeem you back to God. Why would God save us then allow us to go through the Tribulation? He won't! Thankfully! We will be His companion on this special day when He will bring us with Him at His Appearing.

Paul continues to encourage them to be steadfast, to hold on to the teaching he had given them when He was with them and in the subsequent letters he had written. He finishes his instruction with a prayer. He prays along with them and for them.

“Now may our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and our God and Father, who has loved us and given us everlasting consolation and good hope by grace, comfort your hearts and establish you in every good word and work” (2 Thessalonians 2 vv.16-17)

There is double security for us in the Father and the Son. The love that the Father has for us was shown out through the gift of His Son, our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. God loves us, He comforts us and gives us a sure hope, all given through grace. Grace is the blessing of God to an unbelieving world. What more do we need? We have all the tools to stand fast against the attacks of Satan if we hold on to the teachings of the Bible. He can attack, but remember he is a defeated enemy as one day his time will be up, and he will be cast directly into the lake of fire.

The believers of Thessalonica needed assurance and encouragement, as we do today. I would encourage you to get these important events clear in your mind so that you can with confidence enjoy the peace and assurance of knowing what lies ahead. This should motivate us to explain to others future events. So, just as a reminder, the period we live in today is the day of grace. The next event in God's calendar is the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ (1 Thessalonians 4 vv.13-17). When? We don't know exactly, only the Father knows the time, but we are assured it will be soon. The Lord will come into the air to meet every believer, both dead and alive, and take them to His Father's house in heaven, where we will be made most welcome. Then the Day of the Lord will begin. There will be 7 years of tribulation that will come upon the whole world, the second half of which will be utterly terrible. The Lord will then come into the air with every believer (this is known as the Appearing), and He will proceed to defeat all His enemies. Satan will then be bound, and Christ will then reign in righteousness for a thousand years, a period called the Millennium. At the end of the thousand years Satan will be released for a short period and once more mankind will be again taken in by his lies. Then the Lord will finally cast Satan into the lake of fire. The Lord will burn up the present heavens and earth, and every unsaved person will stand before God in judgement. This is the final judgement.

Dear friend, there is a terrible day coming for those who don't know the Lord. Can I plead with you to come to the Lord, acknowledging that you are a sinner and ask for forgiveness? Then there will be no need for concern over the future events in God's calendar. How easy it is to be like the Thessalonians, worried and shaken in our faith. Stand fast and hold on to the wonderful promises of God that have been made known through His word.

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