

THE THESSALONIAN EPISTLES: DIRECTION FOR THE LAST DAYS

IX. Overcoming The Error That The Church Faces The Tribulation

(2 Thessalonians 2:1-17)

I. Introduction

- A. Paul's epistles to the believers at Thessalonica addressed new converts out of raw paganism who faced persecution and false teaching, a recipe for spiritual defeat if they failed to get adequate spiritual insight.
- B. The main aim of Paul in this second epistle to the Thessalonians was to counter his readers' fear that they were then experiencing the Tribulation. Paul handled this issue in 2 Thessalonians 2:1-17, so we view it for insight:

II. Overcoming The Error That The Church Faces The Tribulation, 2 Thessalonians 2:1-17.

- A. Paul's readers had heard that they were already experiencing the "day of the Lord," 2 Thessalonians 2:2. Though the KJV reads "day of Christ" in this verse, the better Greek manuscripts read "day of the Lord," the era that begins with the Tribulation Period and includes Christ's Second Coming, the Millennial Kingdom and the creation of the new universe, Ryrie Study Bible, KJV, 1978, ftns. to 2 Thess. 2:2 and 1 Thess. 5:2.
- B. Since the "day of the Lord" begins with the Tribulation Period and life under the antichrist, Paul's readers were shaken and alarmed by what they had heard, so Paul wrote to counter this error by urging his readers **NOT** to be upset, and he appealed to the rapture in 2 Thessalonians 2:1. Thus, if the rapture, the believers' gathering together unto Christ at His coming as Paul predicted in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, was the *cause* for such believers to be at *peace* concerning the *Tribulation*, the rapture must occur **BEFORE** the *Tribulation!*
- C. Paul then clarified this **PREtribulation rapture truth** in 2 Thessalonians 2:3-17 (as follows):
 1. To preface his remarks about the events that must occur before the Tribulation Period starts, Paul told his readers not to let anyone deceive them into thinking that they were facing the Tribulation, 2 Thess. 2:3a.
 2. Paul then named three events [not necessarily in order] that occur **before** the Tribulation, 2 Thess. 2:3-5:
 - a. There will be "the falling away," *he apostasia*," from which we get the word "apostasy" (2 Thess. 2:3a), B. K. C., N. T., p. 718. There will be a greatly accelerated growth in depth of theological error.
 - b. Also, the "man of sin," the antichrist, will be revealed as exalting himself above all that is called God or that is worshipped so that he sits in the Hebrew temple trying to present himself as God, 2 Thess. 2:3b-5.
 - c. In addition, an Entity that restrains all this lawlessness (2 Thess. 2:6-9) is removed so the lawlessness can be revealed, and this Entity is the Holy Spirit in believers in the Church Who is removed at the rapture:
 - i. Though there is wickedness in the world, much of it is still hidden as a "mystery" until a Restrainer Who is **holding back** the *revelation* of this intense wickedness is **removed**, 2 Thess. 2:6-7 ESV.
 - ii. That Restrainer is not Satan, for he cannot oppose himself (Matt. 12:25-26), nor could it be human governments, for they will not end before the antichrist is unveiled, Ibid., p. 719. The sole Entity strong enough to restrain Satan who empowers the antichrist (2 Thess. 2:9) is God the Holy Spirit Who indwells and seals believers in Christ and Who is removed with them at the rapture! (Ibid.)
 - iii. So, the **rapture** comes **before** the antichrist is **revealed to be** the **antichrist**, and he is **revealed** as such at the **start** of the **seven-year Tribulation by his making a seven-year treaty with Israel as predicted in Daniel 9:27! The rapture thus occurs before the start of the seven-year Tribulation!**
 - iv. [Also, the mid-tribulation rapture view that the Church is raptured after antichrist has been revealed in the first half of the Tribulation errs, for the rapture occurs **before** the antichrist is **revealed!**]
 3. Paul wrote that God will punish the world in the seven-year Great Tribulation by letting them believe that antichrist is God to condemn those who rejected Christ in the previous Church era, 2 Thess. 2:10-12.
 4. However, in sharp contrast to this destiny of a Christ-rejecting world, since Paul's readers had believed in Christ to be saved, God had chosen them unto the salvation of the rapture and the reception of the glory of Christ through sanctification of the Holy Spirit and belief in the truth of Christ's Gospel, 2 Thess. 2:13-14.
 5. Thus, Paul's readers were to stand fast in the comforting belief in the pretribulation rapture that they might not become unproductive in living in fear, but flourish in every good word and work, 2 Thess. 2:15-17.

Lesson: *There will be a strong apostacy and the removal of the Holy Spirit Who restrains the revelation of the antichrist to be the antichrist when the rapture of the Church occurs before the start of the seven-year Tribulation. God will use the Tribulation to punish a Christ-rejecting world with the antichrist's deception. Since we believers in Christ are raptured before the Tribulation, we are to be comforted that we might produce good words and works.*

Application: *May we rest in the hope of the pretribulation rapture and thus abound in good words and works.*