

Two Major Time Frames in the End Times

I. 2 THESSALONIANS—THE PASTORAL CRISIS (2 THESSALONIANS 2:1–2)

*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...
(2 Thessalonians 2:1–3a)*

- A. Paul had taught the Thessalonians about the End Times and the Day of the Lord in three weeks (Acts 17:2) before being driven out of the region by hostile Jews. Forced to leave Macedonia and move south to Athens and Corinth, Paul wrote to these believers after receiving reports about them from Timothy and Silas who stayed behind. He comforted them after the loss of some of their brethren in 1 Thessalonians 4–5 by reminding them of the Second Coming and Rapture but warned them about false teaching on those topics (1 Thessalonians 4:13–18). After he had written his first letter, that false teaching infiltrated the Thessalonian community.
- B. The “rapture” of the saints is not a biblical term, like the term “Trinity,” but it is derived from the phrase that Paul used in 1 Thessalonians 4:17 to describe being “caught up” (Greek: *harpazo*) in the air to meet the Lord when He returns. All believers who are alive at His return will be caught up in the air and then transformed (1 Corinthians 15:51–52) in the “twinkling of an eye” into our glorified bodies. Believers who have died, according to Paul, would be resurrected, caught up first, and then transformed along with the whole Bride of Christ (Hebrews 11:40).
- C. The teaching had spread the idea that Christ had already come and that they had missed the hour of His coming and missed the Rapture. This doctrine had greatly shaken and troubled the believers of Thessalonica. Paul wrote this letter to correct the false teaching and remind the Church about the two major time frames that will precede the Second Coming and the Rapture.
- D. The idea that the Day of the Lord would come without warning—before the two clear and distinct signs that Paul tells the Church to expect—is exposed as a deception. This may seem like strong language to us, but Paul is unapologetic about calling believers to truth on the issue of the timing of the Rapture.
 - 1. In fact, any teaching about the Second Coming is false and deceptive if it does not include the events that the Bible tells us take place prior to the Second Coming. There cannot be a “gathering together to Him” unless certain things happen first. These events will be easily observable to any believer who knows and remembers Paul’s teaching.
- E. This deception that Paul is addressing is everywhere. Three examples are included below. All three responses leave the people of God totally unprepared for the most dramatic time of natural history.

1. The pre-Tribulation doctrine that says the Rapture comes before the Great Tribulation. The idea is that we will never have to see the apostasy or the man of sin. The pre-Tribulation position on the Rapture teaches that we will escape, even though the Bible teaches that we will overcome. There is a radical difference between escaping and overcoming.
2. The second non-biblical doctrine comes from a theological system that allegorizes or makes the primary events symbolic. Therefore, these end-time events will never really happen; they are only symbolic. In other words, there is no literal falling away and no man of sin.
3. The third group is the scoffers (**2 Peter 3:3; Jude 18**). There is a mocking spirit in the world and even in the Church about the topic of the End Times.

II. THE APOSTASY AND THE ANTICHRIST (2 THESSALONIANS 2:3–4)

...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. (2 Thessalonians 2:3b–4)

- A. Paul reveals two major events that will take place before the return of Jesus: the “falling away” (the great apostasy of the Church) and the revealing of the “man of sin” (the Antichrist). These events will happen over two distinct time frames.
- B. **The great falling away of the Church** will come first, related to the emerging humanistic “Harlot Babylon” system that will be **fully empowered globally** for a short season, as described in Revelation 17. This system will provide much of the fuel for believers to reject their faith, lose their salvation, and join a global expression of faith that more closely matches what they thought they were signing up for when they accepted the Gospel.
 1. Jesus spoke of a time of great relational pressure and trial:

Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and kill you, and you will be hated by all nations for My name’s sake. And then many will be offended, will betray one another, and will hate one another. Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many. And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold. (Matthew 24:9–12)
 2. There will be a specific time during a season of great pressure in which many people will openly and publicly reject Jesus and the Church. The pressure will be more than social in nature—it will be a political and religious pressure. People will be pressured to conform to a faith that has been compromised by the teachings and proclamations of deceptive “false prophets” (Matthew 24:11).

3. The deceptive arguments of these false prophets will be so convincing that even the “elect”—the fiery, passionate believers—may be unsure of what is true in the midst of it all, though they will never be fully convinced by the false prophets and will stand firm (Matthew 24:24).
 4. The false prophets will be emissaries of a religious system that seems attractive in every way—in its ability to deliver world peace, economic stability and prosperity, even physical comfort and security. We will know this religious system as Babylon (Revelation 17:1–4).
 5. Babylon will be both a city and a religious system, used by Antichrist during his early maneuverings for influence and power (Revelation 17:3). Babylon will be “drunk with the blood of the saints and of the martyrs of Jesus” (Revelation 17:5).
 6. During the early period of false “peace and safety” (1 Thessalonians 5:2), many saints will lose their lives (be martyred) because they resist the pressure to conform and refuse to do so. Also, many saints will be offended, betray other saints, and hate one another—their love for Jesus will grow cold (Matthew 24:10–12).
 7. This shaking and purifying of the Church will initially be intense; it will be the “dark night of the soul” for the many people who burn with love for Jesus despite affliction (Song of Songs 5:6–16). The shaking will intensify during the Great Tribulation under the direction of Antichrist. However, this time period will also be the purified Bride’s finest hour (Daniel 11:33). Jesus encourages us to “endure to the end” in Matthew 24:13.
- C. **The revealing of the man of sin** follows the great apostasy. This is a second, distinct time frame (according to Revelation 17) in which the Antichrist will emerge and destroy the Harlot system, creating a global context for loyalty to and worship of him alone. His emergence, according to Jesus, marks the beginning of the most extreme time frame for believers in human history: the Great Tribulation (Matthew 24:15–31). Revelation 5:8–6:1 describes this time frame as beginning *after* the Church has come into significant maturity and testing at the hands of the Harlot system (Revelation 17:6).
1. Paul calls him “the man of sin...” When Paul says “the man,” he means that the Antichrist is a **real person** who is coming; he is not just referring to the spirit of antichrist that John spoke of in 1 John 2:18–24. “...of sin” means that Antichrist will be the personification of sin itself—the living embodiment of all that men delight in and esteem in their lust.

2. He is also the called “son of perdition” (2 Thessalonians 2:3). The nature of the Antichrist is mysterious. There seems to be a supernatural aspect to this man as revealed in Revelation 17:8 (he comes out of the abyss) and 19:20 (he will be thrown *alive* into the lake of fire, which is otherwise reserved for those who are not written in the book of life and who are already dead [Revelation 20:14–15] at the beginning of the 1000-year kingdom of Jesus).
3. He will violently and systematically oppose anything that is called God or is worshipped. When he has destroyed religious systems and objects of men’s affection, he will take a central place in the hearts and minds of the peoples of the earth. In his arrogant mind, he will be the only one worthy of praise and adulation. He will despise the Harlot system because of its spiritual bankruptcy and deception, and thus will betray and destroy it. He will rage against Christianity by martyring many believers and establishing a false prayer and worship movement (Revelation 13).
4. To establish his supremacy as the true god of the earth, he will stand in the rebuilt temple in Jerusalem (that he most likely helped to rebuild—see Daniel 9:27) and place an image of himself in the Holy Place, an action that the Bible calls “the abomination of desolation” (Matthew 24:15; Revelation 13:14–15). He will demand that all acknowledge his supremacy over every other God—especially the Hebrew and Christian God and His Son. He will attempt to force all to worship this image, threatening those who resist him with death (Revelation 13:15).

III. THE REMOVAL OF RESTRAINT (2 THESSALONIANS 2:5–7)

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. (2 Thessalonians 2:5–7)

- A. Paul refers the Thessalonians again to his three-week teaching on this subject, briefly mentioning the conditions that will lead to the emergence of this brutal, evil world leader. How does such a man come into such great power and authority? He will be the fruit of the desires of the nations for this kind of king, who represents everything that they long to be. As Israel chose Saul over David, so the nations will choose this man over the true King, Jesus.
- B. This will not be a momentary decision; the coming of the “lawless one” (2 Thessalonians 2:8–9) will be the fruit of the maturity of lawlessness when the “transgressors reach their fullness” (Daniel 8:23). God will give men the god they desire when Satan is cast down to the earth (Revelation 12:7–9) and will give them over to the king they desire as well, as detailed in Romans 1:26.
 1. The Antichrist, the lawless one, will be revealed in his own time – there is a time and season for this man to emerge related to the “what” that is restraining and the “mystery of lawlessness,” or the mystery of man’s hidden rage and deep contempt for God.

- C. The nations will rage against the Lord and seek to establish their own king:
Why do the nations rage, and the people plot a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD and against His Anointed, saying, "Let us break Their bonds in pieces and cast away Their cords from us." (Psalm 2:1–3)
1. As the nations throw off restraint, the Lord will sovereignly remove this restraint in relationship to the "mystery of iniquity"—the hidden hatred for God that resides deep in the heart of men. God will give the nations what they desire.
- D. "What is restraining" (2 Thessalonians 2:5–7) is knit to **lawlessness**. The time frame that Paul is speaking of will be the time of the greatest lawlessness and contempt for righteousness in all of history.

IV. THE COMING OF THE LAWLESS ONE (2 THESSALONIANS 2:8-9)

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 . . . (2 Thessalonians 2:8–9)

- A. The "lawless one" is the one who comes forth in the time of lawlessness that Jesus spoke of, when man's sin is unrestrained and completely expressed. He will be fully revealed at the same time that man's true nature is revealed, in a tragic way that ends with much loss of life, destruction, and widespread poverty, famine and disease.
- B. This man will be completely destroyed and defeated, despite his appearance of great authority, power, and victory even over the saints (Daniel 7:21–25; Revelation 13:5–7). Jesus will win a spectacular and effortless victory over Him as He reveals His glory on behalf of Israel; He will also vindicate the saints who have been worn down and blasphemed against by this man (Revelation 13:6, 19:19–21).
- C. The demonic authority this man will possess to control and deceive will be unprecedented in human history; he will orchestrate a deception unparalleled by any other global leader. Satan himself will give this man his throne of demonic authority (Revelation 13:2) as the Antichrist and the false prophet will do incredible false signs and wonders, counterfeits of the signs and judgments that will strike the earth through Jesus' leadership and the Church's authority (Revelation 13:11–15).

V. THE CENTRAL ISSUE: THE LOVE OF THE TRUTH (2 THESSALONIANS 2:10–12)

...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 Thessalonians 2:10–12, emphasis added)

- A. What is the most necessary thing in this hour—to have all the facts and information or to be a lover of truth? It is critical that we seek truth and a spirit of wisdom (wisdom is different than information; it is right interpretation and living understanding) and revelation. This will come from the Holy Spirit who is jealous for us to come into “all truth” (John 16:13):

Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God. (1 Corinthians 2:12)

Or do you think that the Scripture says in vain, “The Spirit who dwells in us yearns jealously”? (James 4:5)

These things I have written to you concerning those who try to deceive you. But the anointing which you have received from Him abides in you, and you do not need that anyone teach you; but as the same anointing teaches you concerning all things, and is true, and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you will abide in Him. (1 John 2:26–27)

- B. We must become a people who love truth *regardless of truth’s implications and cost for our lives*. Our pleasure must be in righteousness with no toleration for unrighteousness, wickedness, or sin in our lives, ministries, families, or communities. If we will commit to love truth, the Lord will commit to help us to receive it, live it, and express it with boldness and tenderness to the nations of the earth.