

Day of the Lord

2 Thessalonians 2:3—7

Paul has been telling the Thessalonians about future events since his first visit (Acts 17). We see this in his first letter written to them as he clarifies some points, specifically what will happen to believers who have died? Will they be a part of the promised Rapture? A few months later, the Thessalonians are shaken because of the trials and persecution they were going through, and the false letter that came claiming that they missed the Rapture and are now going through the seven-year Tribulation. They were troubled and shaken (as a ship in a storm) because their hope had been taken away from them (compare 1 Thessalonians 1:3 with 2 Thessalonians 1:3). Paul had been emphasizing the difference between the Rapture and the Second Coming so that they would understand the difference of our hope as compared to Israel's hope. Paul continues to contrast the Day of Christ with the Day of the Lord by setting forth details of what is to happen in the Tribulation.

Coming events

The Thessalonians were primed for believing a lie because they were swayed by their emotions. They had taken their eyes off the sound teachings presented by the Apostle Paul because they thought they were currently going through the seven-year Tribulation, based on their current situation. They were under intense persecution, but it was not related to the coming Tribulation. The Thessalonians were pulled into believing a lie because of their emotional state, so Paul takes time to lay out future events, point by point, to allay their fears that they had missed the Rapture.

To put them to rest, Paul tells them that they couldn't be in the Day of the Lord because key events have not yet happened. There are two main things that Paul concentrates on, a falling away and the revelation of the man of sin.

Falling away

The Greek word for this falling away is *apostasia*. We know this word today as apostasy. The only other time the New Testament uses this word is in Acts 21:21 when Paul is accused of falling away from (forsaking) Moses. When a person apostatizes, they leave what they had once believed. A related word (*apostrepho*) is used by Paul to describe those in Asia who turned away from his teaching (2 Timothy 1:15), those who turn away from the truth (Titus 1:14; 2 Timothy 4:4) and, in a positive sense, to turn away from ungodliness (Romans 11:26).

This particular falling away, in 2 Thessalonians 2, is related to Israel when they will turn away from the true Messiah to worship the false Messiah, also known as the antichrist. It seems that they will be willing to accept this antichrist as their Messiah because he will come to them with signs and wonders (Israel is always looking for a sign. Matthew 12:38; 1 Corinthians 1:22) and give them something they have so long desired; peace (Daniel 9:27).

A revelation

The Jews today are looking for their Messiah, qualifying him by some very specific credentials. Although Christians understand the Messiah to be the Son of God, equal with God, the Jews see the Messiah as a man whom God will raise up to save them. They are looking for someone to come in the likeness of King David. It is understood by them that every generation has a person who could fulfill the qualifications of the Messiah. They will be able to identify this Messiah (Mashiach) by the following qualifications.

1. He will be a great political leader who will be descended from King David (Jeremiah 23:5).
2. He will know, understand and observe the Mosaic Law (Isaiah 11:2—5).
3. He will judge righteously and fairly (Jeremiah 33:15).
4. He will be a great military leader who will conquer Israel's enemies and cause Israel to live in safety (Jeremiah 33:16).
5. He will bring the Jewish people back to Israel and restore Jerusalem (Isaiah 11:11—12; Jeremiah 23:8; 30:3; Hosea 3:4—5).
6. He will establish a world government centered in Jerusalem (Isaiah 2:2—4; 11:10; 42:1).
7. He will rebuild the temple and re-establish the temple worship (Jeremiah 33:18).

The antichrist will be revealed at the beginning of the Tribulation with the signing of the peace treaty. He will not be revealed until after the Rapture. He will fool Israel into believing that he is their Messiah by offering peace and making them feel safe (Daniel 9:26—27). He will attempt to establish a world government centered in Jerusalem (Daniel 8:23—25) and build a new tabernacle so Israel will be able to begin sacrifices (Daniel 9:27). He is a man who has literally sold his soul to the Devil (Revelation 13:1—2). He will rise up as a strong, charismatic leader (Daniel 7:20). He will appear to be a friend and protector of Israel by crafting a peace treaty; making Israel feel secure (Daniel 9:27; Ezekiel 38:8, 11, 14). This feeling of safety will last until the middle of the Tribulation, and then those in Jerusalem will find themselves surrounded by armies controlled by the antichrist (Luke 19:43; 21:20). Those who recognized what is happening will immediately flee for their lives (Luke 21:21; Revelation 12:14—17; Psalm 31:20; 83:1—3; Isaiah 26:20—21). God will miraculously protect those who flee, providing them safety (Psalm 27, 46, 91) and supplies (Matthew 6:24—32; Isaiah 33:16). Just as God supplied food and water to Israel as they wandered in the wilderness, and to Elijah as he was by the brook Cherith (1 Kings 17), God will supply Israel with what is needed as He hides the Little Flock from Satan (Isaiah 41:17—21; 43:2, 19—21).

The Restrainer (verse 6—7)

This Restrainer is currently holding back the disclosure of the antichrist. Since Paul is making the case that these things will only happen after the Rapture, we can be assured that the Restrainer is in place right now, keeping Satan at bay and masking the identity of the antichrist. After the Rapture, the Restrainer will be removed, or put aside, allowing the antichrist to use Satan's power to begin his attempt at usurping God's people and destroying His plans. There are several theories as to whom or what the Restrainer is, but the only Person who is able to hold back the power of Satan is God, specifically the Holy Spirit. When God is ready to advance his plan, then He will allow Satan to bring his man on the scene to do his evil work. Everything will be done in God's timing, not Satan's (Galatians 4:4; Mark 1:15; 1 Timothy 2:6; Titus 1:3). To have the Restrainer taken out of the way does not mean that the Holy Spirit is removed from the world, only that He will quit restraining.

Prophecy already fulfilled?

Although many people think that prophecy had been fulfilled when Israel became a country in 1948, this does not fit with what Scripture says. When God gives Israel the land, they will permanently and safely dwell there (Jeremiah 32:37; 33:16). The Bible clearly states that this will happen after God's wrath is poured out and after the Second Coming. If God had put Israel in the land in fulfillment of prophecy in 1948, then they would not need to flee for their lives in the middle of the Tribulation.

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