

Does 2 Thessalonian Tell Us When The Rapture Occurs?

Lesson 8

Does 2 Thessalonians Reveal *When*?

- The Thessalonians prematurely expected escape from all their troubles.
 - They thought the Lord would come right away to destroy their enemies.
 - Paul writes his second epistle to the Thessalonians to correct this false notion, and his theme is *God delays punishment of the wicked in order to produce patience in the believer.*
- Key verses of study.
 - [2 Thessalonians 1:6-8.](#)
 - [2 Thessalonians 2:1-2](#)
- Three Key Points are presented in this book to the Thessalonians
 - There is tribulation, And then there is the great distress or tribulation
 - There is partial relief and full relief is just around the corner.
 - We will not be happy until the final victory when full relief is given.
 - Often we have misinformation that blocks our understanding and alters our attitudes

2 Thessalonians 1: 6-8

- ⁶ since indeed God considers it just to repay with affliction those who afflict you, ⁷ and to grant relief to you who are afflicted as well as to us, when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels ⁸ in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.
- The word "relief" in this passage is a noun, not a verb. God will recompense "relief" to us *after* the tribulation.
- If relief comes after the tribulation, the argument goes, then the rapture comes after the tribulation.
- But does relief and rapture come at the same moment? Does relief mean rapture? This is the unanswered question posed by a post tribulation position.

God will repay	tribulation to them	when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels
	relief to you	

Broad & Narrow Use Of: Tribulation, Relief

- **The word "tribulation" can be used in two ways.**
 - the *period* of the great distress or tribulation for unbelievers.
 - But Paul in this passage uses "tribulation" to mean God's vengeance at the *end* of the period on unbelievers.
 - So the answer is yes, "tribulation" (in the narrow sense) occurs *after* the "tribulation" (in the broad sense).
- **What about the word "relief"?**
 - Usually when we say "relief" we mean relief in the broad sense, relief from persecution, escape from trouble. Rapture is rest in the broad sense.
 - But Paul has a narrow specific meaning in mind for "relief." For him "relief" means the glory of the Lord being revealed in the saints.
- **Which did Paul mean?**
 - After introducing "tribulation" in verse 6, Paul explains in verses 8–9 what he means by "tribulation." It is vengeance and destruction.
 - After introducing "relief" in verse 7, Paul explains in verse 10 that what he means by relief is glory and admiration. The Lord's glory shines forth in us, because they see that God is in us.
- **That is relief in the *fullest* sense. It is not mere relief from persecution, which is only *half* relief. Rapture is only *half* rest.**
 - After the rapture sin *still* reigns on the earth.
 - God is *still* scorned.
 - Neither are the raptured believers recognized and vindicated.
 - Even though we are in heaven, no one else knows it.
 - No one who truly loves righteousness could be content with this half-rest condition.

The Final Victory, The Final Glory

- We long for that *final victory*
 - When God reveals Himself to the whole world,
 - when righteousness finally defeats sin, and
 - when the whole world admires us for who we really are.
 - When you and I come riding down from the sky on those white horses ([Revelation 19:14](#)), then those who knew us on earth will stand with their mouths gaping in astonishment. "They were not crazy after all! God is in them!"
 - That's more than relief. That's vindication.
- The martyrs in [Revelation 6:9-11](#) feel the same way.
 - These martyrs, *even though they are in heaven*, do not have full rest. "They cried with a loud voice, saying, How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?"
 - They are told to rest temporarily until the time for the full and natural relief that Paul talks about.
 - Why are they not satisfied having full relief? They long for God's *vengeance*. Having half-relief for themselves does not satisfy.
- Going up is rapture. Coming down is glory (whether one second later or seven years later). Paul centers on the second part, glory, when he speaks of "relief."
- So [2 Thessalonians 1:6-7](#) must be unraveled completely. We cannot leave half of it still tangled. Just as "tribulation," in the full sense, comes *after* the tribulation, so "rest" in the full sense comes *after* the half-rest of the rapture. Both "tribulation" and "rest," in the broad sense, *begin* seven years earlier; but both *culminate* at the end. Paul was not addressing the timing of the Rapture here.

2 Thessalonians 2:1-2

- Now concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered together to him, we ask you, brothers,² not to be quickly shaken in mind or alarmed, either by a spirit or a spoken word, or a letter seeming to be from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come.
- In this context what exactly is Paul asking? Is he asking ...
 - *Concerning* our gathering unto Him as post-tribs claim?
 - Is he asking *concerning* the rapture?
 - Not even once does Paul mention the rapture in the entire rest of the book. It lies in the background; it forms the *foundation* for what he is talking about.
- But a simple reading of the epistle shows that Paul is asking *concerning* something entirely different.
- Paul was talking about their attitude which he tries to adjust later in [3:6](#)

Attitude Adjustment

Comparison

[2:1-2](#)

[3:6](#)

Basis of asking

Now concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered together to him, we ask you, brothers,

Now we command you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,

Object of asking

not to be quickly shaken in mind or alarmed, either by a spirit or a spoken word, or a letter seeming to be from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come.

that you keep away from any brother who is walking in idleness and not in accord with the tradition that you received from us.

2 Thessalonians 2:3

- Let no one deceive you in any way. For that day will not come, unless the rebellion [Falling Away] comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction,
- This verse is constantly used to try to establish the timing of the rapture. The key phrase is the rebellion [Falling away by older and more correct translations]
- The troublesome term has been “rebellion” or “falling away.” What does it mean? There are two common views.
 - Some believe it is a falling away from the faith, or apostasy.
 - Others feel it is a falling away from the earth, or rapture.
 - Depending on their view of the time of the day of the Lord, some use the "falling away" to "prove" that the rapture comes before the man of sin while
 - others use the same verse to "prove" that the man of sin comes before the rapture.
- Paul introduces a topic and then explains it. [Verse 3](#) *introduces* two topics:
 - "the falling away" and
 - the "revealing."
- The following verses go on to *explain* these topics. [Verse 4](#) explains the "revealing" of the man of sin while [verses 6–7](#) explain the “falling away.”

Paul Introduces Two Topics

	Removal	Revealing
Introduction	Let no one deceive you in any way. For that day will not come, unless the rebellion [falling away] comes first, (3a)	and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction (3b)
Explanation	And you know what is restraining him now so that he may be revealed in his time. ⁷ For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work. Only he who now restrains it will do so until he is out of the way (6-7)	who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God. (4)

- What is "the falling away"?
 - It is none other than the taking out of the way of the One who is holding back the revealing of the man of sin.
 - The removal of one allows the revealing of the other.
- Who is "the One who is holding back"?
 - I agree with many Bible scholars that it is the Holy Spirit. He is the one with the power to hold back the man of sin. If it is not the Holy Spirit, then I do not know of any other explanation for both the masculine and neuter which are used in [verses 6-7](#). "What withholdeth" ([verse 6](#)) is neuter in accordance with the word "spirit" which is neuter in the Greek. "He who now letteth" ([verse 7](#)) is masculine in accordance with the real personality of the third person of the Godhead.

The Falling Away ...

- How does the Holy Spirit restrain the man of sin?
 - Through the church? No, but by direct and personal restraint.
 - "Become out of the midst" [or, "taken out of the way"] does not demand removal from the world. "Midst" more literally means "middle." The restrainer is standing in the middle, i.e., between the *person* of the Antichrist and the *revelation* of the Antichrist. It is as though the Antichrist stands in the wings, eager to break forth onto the stage of history. But the Holy Spirit blocks entrance until the appointed moment when He will step out of the way and allow the man of lawlessness to stride onstage before the admiring eyes of mankind (Gundry's Commentary)
- "The falling away" is the removal of the Holy Spirit only. It has nothing to do with the rapture at all. The rapture and the "falling away" are totally separate, both in Paul's teaching and also in time by 3½ years
- Second [Thessalonians 2](#) speaks only of the Holy Spirit's relation to antichrist, not to the rest of the world.

The Heart Of The Teaching

- [Chapter 1](#) said the day of the Lord begins *after* the tribulation..
- [Chapter 2](#) mentions the "day of the Lord" but does not define it.
- Paul assumes the Thessalonians *already know* what this from what he has previously written and taught.
- What was on the minds of the Thessalonians? And what was on the mind of Paul?
 - *persecution* was uppermost on the minds of the Thessalonians (see [1:4](#) and following).
 - If you were in their shoes you would hope for the day when the persecution would *stop and soon*.
 - That is why Paul told them about the "righteous judgment of God" ([1:6](#)). This righteous judgment comes *after* the tribulation ([1:7-8](#)).
 - It is true that some will have "relief" from persecution by the time the tribulation *begins*, the first generation Thessalonians by death and the last generation of the church by rapture.

The Heart Of The Teaching (2)

- God does not *stop* persecution during the tribulation; final judgment occurs *only after the tribulation*. This is the day of the Lord.
- To correct this notion Paul wrote that the day is *not* yet upon us but it is *delayed* ([2:2-3](#)), and to prove the delay he reminds them of the events which lead up to the day of the Lord. These events lead up to the *final destruction* ([2:8](#)).
- Permeating both chapters one and two is the emphasis on the *final vengeance*, not tribulation events.
 - Chapter one explains the *fairness* of vengeance, while
 - Chapter two explains the *delay* of vengeance.
 - The time is *after* the tribulation.