

# The Rapture in 1 & 2 Thessalonians

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**P**aul had gone to Macedonia after seeing the vision of a man who said, "Come over into Macedonia and help us!" The chief city in Macedonia was Philippi where Paul found Lydia; a Jewish woman from Thyatira; a seller of purple. There was no synagogue in Philippi and the Jews prayed by the river either under a tree or in a prayer room. The Lord opened Lydia's heart to receive the Gospel and she and her household were saved and baptized.

When Paul cast a demon out of a woman that was a soothsayer her masters dragged Paul and Silas before the magistrates, where their clothes were torn off and they were given many stripes before being thrown into prison. At midnight Paul and Silas sang praises to God and there was a great earthquake which released them from their the chains and flung the prison doors open.

When the Jailer found the prison doors open he would have killed himself but Paul assured him the prisoners were all there and he and Silas were taken to the Jailors house, where they were bathed and fed. The whole household was saved when Paul preached the Gospel and the magistrates ordered the release of Paul and Silas.



Paul then went to Thessalonica where he reasoned with the Jews in the synagogue for three sabbaths and many believed. However, evil Jews assaulted the house of Jason and when they did not find Paul and Silas they took Jason and some of the brethren before the rulers who put them into custody and later released them. The believers then took Paul by night to Berea where the Jews were more noble and received the Word of God. But when the Jews at Thessalonica heard they came to Berea to stir up opposition and Paul went south to Athens in Greece.

The Jews in Thessalonica were particularly evil and the Christians there suffered for Christ. At Philippi the Gentiles had opposed the Apostle but at Thessalonica it was the Jews.

The Epistles to the Thessalonians were written from Corinth, and not Athens though the subscripts say it was Athens. The First Epistle to the Thessalonians was Paul's first epistle (about AD52) and was written from Corinth where Paul preached for 18 months (Acts 18:11).

### *The Thessalonian's First Concern*

Paul had informed the Thessalonian Christians about the Rapture of the Church in the short time he was with them and it was a misunderstanding about the Rapture that Paul clarified in his first epistle to the them. The concern of the Christians was that **believers who died would miss out on the Rapture**. Paul assured them that *"if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God **bring with him**"* (1Thess.4:14).

When a Christian dies the soul departs *"to be with Christ which is far better"*(Phil.1:23) and is clothed with a **heavenly body** (2Cor.5:1-4).

The Christians who die will not miss out on the resurrection of their **physical body** for at the Rapture, their bodies will be raised **FIRST** and only **THEN** the living saints will be changed to receive their resurrection body and both would be caught up **together** to meet the Lord in the air. They would not miss the Rapture!

The souls of the deceased believers will therefore **come from heaven** with the Lord. The Lord will pause in the heavens until the bodies are raised and gathered to Him in the air.

## *The Thessalonian's Second Concern*

Paul's second epistle to the Thessalonians responded to another concern of the Christians. Paul had taught them in his first epistle that they were **not appointed** to the wrath of the Day of the Lord but they were experiencing fierce persecution from evil Jews and some were saying that the Tribulation, which he calls "*the day of Christ*", had already come and they had been left behind.

*"We beseech you...that ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand (now present)"* (2Thess.2:1-2).

This second concern actually confirms that the Thessalonians **had been taught** that the Church would be raptured BEFORE the Tribulation. If it was true that the Tribulation had already come why would they be concerned unless they expected to be Raptured before it? In view of the fact that Paul had clearly told the Thessalonians that the believers were **not appointed to wrath** (of the Day of the Lord) in 1Thess.5:9, the obvious implication was that they must have missed the Rapture.

The use of the **definite article** indicates that Paul had made reference to the subject under discussion in 2 Thessalonians chapter 2 on **a previous occasion**. Erasmus states that it indicates an event "before predicted" and *Barnes' Notes* on 2 Thessalonians state:

*"It is evidently emphatic, showing that there had been a reference to this before."*

This is plainly stated by Paul when he wrote:

*"Remember ye not, that, when I was yet with you, I told you these things?"* (2Thess.2:5).

What then had Paul told the Thessalonian Christians on some previous occasion? Had he previously told them of a great apostasy in the last days? There is **not one word** of such an apostasy in the last days in his first epistle but he had told them two things:

i) That they would suffer persecution for Christ just as Paul was suffering which he mentions in 1Thess.3:7. He said:

*"That no man should be moved by these afflictions: for yourselves know that we are appointed thereunto. For verily, when we were with you, we told you before that we should suffer tribulation; even as it came to pass, and ye know"* (1Thess.3:3-4).

ii) That there would be a great departure of the Christians at the Rapture (1Thess.4:13-18) and that they were NOT appointed to the wrath of the Day of the Lord (1Thess.5:1-9).

So Paul had told them that they were **appointed to persecution** but were **NOT appointed to the wrath** of the Day of the Lord!

On this basis then the deceivers who were telling them that the persecution they were enduring was the judgment of the Day of the Lord were entirely wrong and THAT DAY of the Lord shall NOT come **unless two things happen**; there would be “*THE departure*” and “*the man of sin*” is revealed.

First Paul comforts the Thesalonians that God would judge those who persecuted them (2Thess.1:7-9) but he had to provide an answer to those who had been saying that the Tribulation had already come.

In his answer Paul begins by differentiating between the Rapture and the Second Advent: He beseeches them

*“by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, AND by our gathering together unto him”* (2Thess.2:1).

Thus Paul differentiates between the glorious 2nd Advent and the gathering of the Church to Christ at the Rapture. He beseeches the believers by the **coming** and **OUR GATHERING** to the Lord. These are separate events!

Then Paul says, Don't be troubled by those who say

*“that the day of Christ (day of the Lord) is at hand (now present). Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come except there come a falling away (lit. THE departure) first, and that man of sin be revealed...”* (2Thess.2:2-3).

Those who said that Christians would go through the Tribulation were deceivers! Amillennialists and SDAs tell us the same thing today and Paul says **they are deceivers!**

Then Paul states that his reason for making such a strong assertion is because the Tribulation could not begin until two things occurred:

a) There must be “*THE departure FIRST*” and,

b) The “*man of sin*” must be revealed.

Unless we can prove that these two events **have already occurred** we have no right to say that we are now in the Tribulation.

The words “*falling away*” need clarification. Most Bible translations today translate the Greek word *apostasia* as “*a falling away*” but they have transliterated the Greek instead of translating, just as they transliterated the Greek word *baptizo* as “*baptize*” to accommodate those who believed in infant sprinkling. Our English word apostasy is a transliteration of the Greek word *apostasia*. However, *apostasia* appears only twice in the New Testament and is translated, “*falling away*” and “*forsake*”. It is the feminine noun form of the root verb *aphistaymee*.

*Aphistaymee* appears 15 times and is translated 11 times as “*depart*” (usually a **physical departure**), once it is translated “*refrain*”, “*fall away*”, “*drew away*”, and “*withdraw*”. Five earlier English translations of the Bible all translated 2Thess.2:3 as “*departure*.” Once it is a **departure from ERROR!** (1Tim.6:5) which shows it can’t be departing from truth or apostasy in all cases. The context must indicate what “*the departure*” is from.

Based on the above evidence and especially the context, there is no doubt that the correct translation is “*the departure*”. The definite article is in the Greek and indicates a **specific event** with which the Thessalonians were already familiar just as the revelation of the man of sin will also be a **definite event**. “*A falling away*” is not a definite event but a prevailing condition. For a full discussion on the Greek text see *Prophetic Light in the Present Darkness* ch.3 by the Greek scholar Kenneth S. Wuest.

The Thessalonians were familiar with the truth of “*the departure*” (Rapture) of the Church as described in the first epistle to the Thessalonians and the whole reason for the second epistle was to correct what those deceivers were teaching that the Christians were already in the Tribulation and had missed the Rapture! The error Paul was correcting was a denial that the Rapture would occur BEFORE the Tribulation.

The revelation of the “*man of sin*” (Antichrist) is the other event that must precede the Tribulation. It will occur when Antichrist confirms a covenant with Israel for 7 years. Thus the departure of the Church and the appearance of Antichrist must precede the Tribulation which means that the Church does NOT go through the Tribulation.

## *The Hinderer Removed Before the Tribulation*

Having exposed the deceivers who had told the Thessalonians that the Tribulation had already come Paul gives a further reason why the Tribulation had not come:

*“And now ye know what withholdeth (restrains) **that he (the man of sin) might be revealed in his time.** For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only **he who now hinders** will hinder, UNTIL he be taken out of the way. And THEN shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming” (2Thess.2:6-8).*

The Tribulation begins when Antichrist confirms his 7-year covenant with Israel but someone is hindering the revelation of Antichrist and it is the Holy Spirit as He indwells the Church.

The Holy Spirit came on the day of Pentecost and now indwells every member of the body of Christ. He also indwells the Church as the Temple of God. While ever the Holy Spirit is here indwelling the Church, Antichrist cannot be revealed but when *“he who now hinders”* is *“taken out of the way...THEN shall that wicked one be revealed”*.

Again Scripture confirms that the Church must be Raptured BEFORE Antichrist is revealed which means the Rapture must occur before the Tribulation begins!

If the Tribulation cannot begin until the man of sin is revealed, and the man of sin cannot be revealed until the hinderer is removed, then ***the Church must be Raptured before the Tribulation.***

The sequence of events is clear:

- 1) The Hinderer must be removed.
- 2) Then the man of sin can be revealed, and finally;
- 3) The Tribulation can commence and Antichrist sit in the rebuilt temple at Jerusalem where he will claim to be God.

Those who change this order of events are deceivers. It is a serious error and not a permissible point of view. It is a denial of *“the blessed hope”* of the Church when the Bride of the Lamb will be taken to the Father’s house for the wedding. They can’t change Christ’s wedding day!