
NOTES ON THE

EPISTLES

TO THE

THESSALONIANS



FOREVER
with the Lord

...The dead in Christ shall rise first. Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds. . .

(1 Thessalonians 4:16-17)

by **Peter Jackson**

FOR THE HERALD OF HOPE

The First Resurrection or the Resurrection of Life – John 5:29



Bema Seat and Marriage of the Lamb
(2 Cor. 5:10)



2ND COMING
Christ comes
"from the wedding"
(Luke 12:36)



The New Heaven and New Earth for the saved
(Rev. 21 & 22)

FIRST FRUITS
All the Old Testament Saints rose with Christ. Paradise was taken to Heaven
(Matt. 27:52-53)

HARVEST
The Rapture of the Church
(1 Thess. 4:13-18, 1 Cor. 15:50-54)

GLEANINGS
Tribulation Martyrs
(Rev. 11:12, Rev. 20:4)

GLEANINGS
Millennial Saints
(Rev. 20:5)



Age of Law

Paradise where the Old Testament Saints waited for Christ to rise.
(Luke. 24:7-28)



The Great Gulf

The Church Age
(Eph. 3:1-10)

7 Years Tribulation
(Matt. 24:7-28)

1,000 Year Reign of Christ on Earth
(Rev. 20:1 -10)

Marriage Supper
(Rev. 19:9)

The bodies of the unsaved dead in the grave await resurrection to the Great White Throne.

Hell ("Hades") - a place of torment where unsaved souls await the Resurrection to Damnation at the Great White Throne.

The Resurrection to Damnation at the Great White Throne
(Rev. 11-25)

The everlasting Lake of Fire "Gehenna"



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by

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Published by the Editorial Committee of
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Preface

PAUL wrote to seven Churches and his epistles provide a compendium of doctrine for Christians from Pentecost to the Rapture. John also wrote letters to seven Churches, and these provide a prophetic outline of the history of the professing Church over the same period. Paul's message was **doctrinal**, while John's message was **prophetic**.

The seven doctrinal messages are addressed to the following Churches and cover all elements of Truth

- 1) Romans gives us the foundational doctrines of sin and salvation.
- 2) The Epistles to the Corinthians provide practical teaching for the local Church.
- 3) Galatians shows the relationship between law and grace.
- 4) Ephesians describes the heavenly character of the Church, her wealth, walk and warfare.
- 5) Philippians tells us how to rejoice in the midst of affliction.
- 6) Colossians presents the headship of Christ over creation, the Church and angels.
- 7) Both Epistles to the Thessalonians major on the theme of the Lord's return, firstly for His Church and later with His Church.

All of these Epistles may touch on the prophetic theme, but every chapter in the two Epistles to the Thessalonians offers instruction and exhortation based on the prospect that Christ will come, either to rescue His bride before the dark "day of the Lord", or to reign.

In both Epistles Paul confirms that the catching away of the Church must occur **before** the Great Tribulation. The fears of the Thessalonian believers that the persecution they were enduring may have been the awful time of the "day of the Lord", were the reason for Paul's assurances that neither the "day of the Lord" nor the Antichrist could come until the Church had been removed. He states: "*That day shall not come EXCEPT...*" and, "*ye, brethren are not in darkness, that **that day should overtake you...** For God hath **NOT appointed us to wrath...***" (2 Thess. 2:3; 1 Thess. 5:4,9).

Throughout these Epistles there are many practical exhortations to holy living, giving the lie to the accusation that Christians who live in expectation of the Lord's return are less likely to be diligent in the work of God.

(The following chapters appeared as a series of articles in the Herald of Hope magazine during 2006 and 2007 and are now published as one volume in response to requests from our readers.)

Chapter 1 –

Introduction -1 Thess. 1:1-10

“From you sounded out the word of the Lord not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith to God-ward is spread abroad; so that we need not to speak any thing... how ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God; And to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come” (1 Thess. 1:8-10).

IT WAS around AD52 after attending the Council of Jerusalem, that Paul set out on his second missionary journey. He had intended to travel with Barnabas and their plan was to visit all the cities where Paul had ministered on his first missionary journey. However, a problem arose over whether John Mark should accompany them.

Finally, Barnabas took Mark and set off for Cyprus, and Paul chose Silas and travelled north to encourage the young churches.

At Lystra they were joined by Timothy, and Paul planned to continue north into Galatia but the Holy Spirit forbade them to preach the Word in Asia. They then travelled into the region of Mysia.

Paul planned to turn north into Bithynia, a region that stretches along the Black Sea, but again the Spirit of God *“suffered them not”*. Finally, they arrived in the Aegean seaport of Troas. It was there that Paul had a vision of a man from Macedonia beseeching that he come over into Macedonia and help them.

Knowing that this was a message from God, Paul immediately set sail across the Aegean Sea for Europe where he spoke to Jews by the river at Philippi and Lydia, a believer in God, became a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ.

At Philippi, Paul cast demons out of a fortune-telling girl and her masters had Paul and Silas cast into prison.

At midnight, as Paul and Silas prayed and praised God in the *“inner prison”*, an earthquake shook Philippi and the prison doors were flung open. The stocks on their feet were released and God set them free. The jailer and his household then believed and were saved.

In the morning the magistrates sent a message ordering Paul and Silas to depart from the city, but Paul informed them that they were Roman citizens, and they *“besought them, and brought them out, and desired them to depart out of the city”* (Acts 16:39).

Lydia and the new believers, farewelled Paul and his companions and they continued their journey to the city of Thessalonica.

Thessalonica was built by Cassander, one of Alexander the Great's generals, who assumed rule of Macedonia following Alexander's death. The city was named after his wife who was the half-sister of Alexander the Great.

When the Roman Empire expanded Thessalonica surrendered to the Romans in 168BC, and was made the capital of the Roman province of Macedonia because of its strategic location.

By the time Paul and his co-workers visited the city it was a thriving metropolis and trading city with a population of two hundred thousand people, linking Europe and Asia. The harbour at Thessalonica was active until the eighteenth century, but the city suffered a fire in 1917 which burned for 32 hours destroying most of the old town and leaving seventy-two thousand people homeless. As a result of the fire half of the Jewish population emigrated, many to Palestine, but during the German occupation in WWII, 60,000 Jews were exterminated. About 1,000 survived those awful years.

Today the city is the second largest in Greece, with a population of around 360,000 and a further 400,000 in its sprawling suburbs.



PAUL IN THESSALONICA

The Jews at Thessalonica were merchants and traders and there was a large congregation at the local synagogue. For three successive sabbaths Paul reasoned with them and proved that Christ first had to suffer, and then be raised from the dead, declaring that this same Jesus whom he was proclaiming was the very Christ.

Some of the Jews, and many Greeks including prominent women in the town, believed, but *“the Jews which believed not, moved with envy...set all the city on an uproar”* (Acts 17:5).

The mob then broke into Jason’s house and brought him before the rulers of the city, accusing him of harbouring men who preached that Jesus was the true King and not Caesar.

When Jason was ordered to put up a bond to be forfeited in the event of more trouble, the brethren, fearing further disturbances, sent Paul and Silas to Berea. However, when word of Paul’s ministry in Berea reached Thessalonica, his opponents followed him and so stirred up the people that he had to secretly leave the city, travelling by ship to Athens.

Timothy and Silas remained in Berea, but after Paul arrived in Athens he sent messages for them to join him. When they finally caught up with Paul he was in Corinth. It was during his stay in this city that Paul wrote his Epistles to the Thessalonian Church, to encourage them and elaborate on misunderstandings that had occurred in the doctrines that Paul had taught during his brief visit. (The full story is in Acts 15:36-18:1).

THE MESSAGE OF THE EPISTLES TO THE THESSALONIANS

First, Paul wanted to assure his Thessalonian believers of his love and concern for them. He had left the city hastily at night, and he was concerned lest they think he had deserted them.

Also Paul’s enemies were attacking his character and spreading lies concerning him. In this first letter Paul assures his readers of his love and integrity.

His second purpose was to establish them in the major doctrines of the Christian faith. Almost every doctrine of the Christian faith is mentioned, with special emphasis on the doctrine of Christ’s return which appears in every chapter of both Epistles.

Error needed correction, because some thought the Tribulation had already come and that the *“dead in Christ”* had missed out on the Rapture.

Thirdly, instruction about careless living was needed. The believers were encouraged to live holy lives while they waited for Christ’s return.

The message of these Epistles makes them as relevant today as they were to the Church in Thessalonica. We live in an age where there is much confusion and false teaching concerning the Lord's return. Amillennialism teaches the Tribulation is here already, and many deny the doctrine of the Rapture.

Moral standards within society and Christendom are far from godly and the world is permeating the Church. We need to examine the message of these letters and apply them to our present situation.

PAUL'S GREETING

In his customary greeting, Paul addresses the Church "*in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ*", and in so doing he is reminding the Church that it is a company of believers which was a part of the body of Christ. By one Spirit they had all been baptised into one body (1 Cor. 12:13). They were no longer Jew or Gentile but a local expression of the Church of God (Gal. 3:28).

It is this relationship which sets New Testament believers apart from Old Testament saints who were never "*in Christ*". Neither does the expression apply to Tribulation saints or millennial saints but is unique to the Church.

Paul encourages the Church by telling them that he has them constantly in his prayers, and is thankful to God for bringing them to the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ.

No doubt Timothy had brought news to Paul in Corinth, and from his own experience he brings to remembrance three great attributes of these believers: their "*work of faith*", their "*labour of love*", and their "*patience of hope*" (1 Thess. 1:3).

YOUR WORK OF FAITH

In verse 9 of this chapter Paul tells us that they had "*turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God.*" That verse summarises **faith at work**. Their spiritual experience began with repentance, a concept not often preached in churches today.

Repentance is more than mere reformation. It is a turning away from sin **to God with the whole heart**.

What a joy it is to see a person come **to Christ** and turn his or her back on the world and the old life of sin; embracing with joy Christ's new life, without the trappings of the old. Paul said:

"If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature (creation): old things are passed away; behold all things are become new" (2 Cor. 5:17).

The evidence of changed lives caused Paul to write, "*Knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God, FOR our gospel came not unto you in word only but in power and*

in the Holy Ghost...” (1 Thess. 1:4-5). Salvation is **a work of God and He chooses those who believe in Christ**. The Thessalonians had responded to the Gospel which was preached and the evidence of a work of God followed. Peter expressed it:

“Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience...” (1 Peter 1:2).

It is God who convicts and converts. The sinner must turn and believe. Paul says of these new believers that they had turned from idolatry to worship the true God, and there were three things which brought about this miraculous change.

- i) Verse 5 states that the Gospel came to them **“in word”**. Paul preached to them the message that Jesus Christ died, rose from the dead, and is coming again; he brought them the Word of God, the message of salvation. No other message can save.
- ii) But the word also came **“in power and in the Holy Ghost”**. As the Word was preached the Holy Spirit convicted them of their need of salvation. On the night before Christ was crucified, He told the disciples that it was necessary for Him to go away, for only then would the Comforter come, and He would reprove the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment.

The disciples were given the responsibility to **“preach the word”** (2 Tim. 4:2), but it was God the Holy Spirit who brought conviction. Until we see our need we will not receive the Word and respond.

The testimony of the Thessalonians comes as a warning to many who profess to be Christians but have never known a work of the Spirit of God in their lives. Salvation is a life-changing experience. It makes a man or woman a new creature in Christ. It is regeneration; a new birth. It is death to the world and its sinful, soulish pleasures.

- iii) The message came **“in much assurance”**. The message of Paul was, *“Thus saith the Lord”*, and he lived the message he preached. Human speculation had no part in apostolic preaching. It was not a matter of interpretation or someone’s “point of view” and there were no alternative solutions. God had commanded *“all men everywhere to repent”*; there was no room for debate. Also, the genuineness of Paul’s life bore testimony to the genuineness of his message. Only a consistent Christian life will enable us to preach the message with power and much assurance.

YOUR LABOUR OF LOVE

The second thing that Paul rejoiced over was their *“labour of love”*. They had *“received the word in much affliction”*, yet they rejoiced *“with joy in the Holy Ghost”*.

The word indicates that in both body and mind they came under great pressure because of their newfound faith, but through the power of the Spirit of God they rejoiced in their persecutions and as a result the news of their turning to God had spread far and wide (1 Thess. 1:7-8). They became “*ensamples to all that believe in Macedonia and Achaia*”.

To the Romans Paul wrote:

*“We glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; And patience, experience; and experience, hope: And hope maketh not ashamed; because **the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us**”* (Rom. 5:3-5).

Persecution had not silenced their testimony, on the contrary, Paul says:

*“From you sounded out the word of the Lord not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also **in every place**”* (1 Thess. 1:8).

Paul did not need to tell those he met that a work of grace had been done in the hearts of these people. Their service for Christ was not a drudgery but a vibrant “*labour of love*” as the love of Christ was shed abroad in their hearts. He wrote:

*“Your faith to God-ward is spread abroad; so that **we need not speak anything**”* (1 Thess. 1:8).

The Thessalonians had become followers of Paul and his fellow labourers, which shows the power of godly example.

YOUR PATIENCE OF HOPE

Finally, Paul says that he thanked God for their “*patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.*”

Patience is needed as we wait for the Lord to come. James wrote:

*“**Be patient** therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord...**Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh**”* (James 5:7-8).

In Paul’s second epistle to the Thessalonians he states:

*“The Lord direct your hearts into the love of God, and into the **patient waiting for Christ**”* (2 Thess. 3:5).

Patience is needed for we do not know the hour of the Lord’s return and when Jesus told the parable of the evil servant He warned the Jews in a future day not to say,

“My Lord delayeth his coming” (Matt. 24:48).

The message of the Lord’s return is not a complicated doctrine for mature Christians. It was a message taught to babes in Christ and these Thessalonians were waiting for Christ to come from the moment of their conversion. They had “*turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God and to **WAIT for his***

*Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, **which delivered us from the wrath to come***” (1 Thess. 1:10).

Not only had these believers been taught to watch for the Lord’s return, but also that they **would not go through the Tribulation**. Paul links the coming of the Lord FOR His saints (the Rapture), with deliverance **“FROM the wrath to come”** (from the day of the Lord or Great Tribulation).

The Greek words *“delivered from”* suggests we are “rescued from.” and not “preserved in”. There are many who tell us we are now either experiencing the Tribulation, or that we will have to go through the Tribulation. Some teach we will not be raptured until half-way through the Tribulation but that is not Paul’s teaching to the Thessalonian Church. Christians are kept away from **the time** of God’s wrath; not preserved in it.

As we continue through each chapter we will see that the grand theme of these epistles is the coming of the Lord. In the meanwhile may we heed the example of this young Church. Having **turned** away from sin, may we **serve** God while we expectantly **wait** for the commanding shout, *“Come up hither!”*

We will find that the “blessed hope” will have a purifying effect on our daily lives as John indicated:

“When he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as HE is pure”
(1 John 3:3).

Chapter 2 – A Pattern for Pastors

- 1 Thess. 2:1-20

“So being affectionately desirous of you, we were willing to have imparted unto you, not the gospel of God only, but also our own souls, because ye were dear unto us” (1 Thess. 2:8).

IN CHAPTER two of this first epistle we are introduced to Paul the pastor. It is a timely reminder that there is a need not only to preach the Gospel, but also to shepherd and “*feed the flock of God*”. Paul looks forward to the day when the sheep would be his “*crown of rejoicing... in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming*” (1 Thess. 2:19-20).

In the opening verse of this chapter the Thessalonians were reminded that Paul’s visit to their city was not without results; “*not in vain*”. He sowed the seed and God gave the increase. Their transformed lives were a living testimony to the work of grace.

First, Paul reflects on the earlier hardships he and Silas had endured in Philippi where they had been stripped, beaten with “*many stripes*”, thrown into prison, and placed in the stocks. After officials learned that Paul was a Roman citizen, he and Silas were ordered out of town (Acts 16:20-26), yet this did not deter them when they came to Thessalonica. They had fearlessly preached the Gospel “*with much contention*”, knowing that the same thing could happen again.

Paul was aware of the consequences of preaching but recalls:

“For, when we were come into Macedonia, our flesh had no rest, but we were troubled on every side; without were fightings, *within were fears*” (2 Cor. 7:5).

The Apostle was not immune to fear and his courage was from the Lord as he and his co-workers were “*approving themselves as the ministers of God*” (2 Cor. 6:4).

Had Paul been an ecumenical preacher he would have avoided persecution but He could not join the local fraternal of false religions, or compromise the message of the Gospel of Jesus Christ before the Jewish community and he paid the price.

WHAT PASTORS SHOULD NOT DO

In verses 3 to 6 the Thessalonians are reminded of the genuineness of Paul’s message and ministry.

1) He says his preaching was without “*deceit (error), nor of uncleanness, nor in guile*”. Paul had been “*allowed (approved) of God*” (v. 4) to preach the Gospel entrusted to him, and therefore was bound to **please God, and not men**. As a

true servant of God the morally unclean behaviour which was a major feature of Greek religious practice, was entirely absent.

- 2) Paul had been scrupulously **honest** and had not used flattery as “*a cloke of covetousness*”(v. 5). He wasn’t trying to “feather his own nest”, but saw himself as a steward entrusted by God to faithfully carry the Gospel of salvation to lost men and women.

Similar words were written to the Corinthian Church:

*“Therefore seeing we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we faint not; But have **renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully; but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man’s conscience in the sight of God... we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus sake**” (2 Cor. 4:1-2, 5).*

Paul did not engage in trickery or self promotion. His ministry was not an empty egocentric contemporary gimmick to gain followers; but a self effacing proclamation of the Lord Jesus Christ. The genuineness of his ministry was evident to **the conscience** of his hearers.

- 3) Paul was conscious that he was under constant scrutiny by God and men, and states: “*God is my witness*” (v. 5). In verse 10 he adds, “*Ye are witnesses, and God also*”(v10), so he would not dare serve with the wrong motives, nor preach another gospel to them.
- 4) Paul was not a crowd pleaser. He courageously spoke the Word of God with great boldness, but because the Thessalonians could not see his motives, he submits himself to God, “*who trieth (proves) our hearts*” (v. 4). His life was transparent, and God who sees the motives of the heart, was witness.
- 5) Paul did not seek personal praise, “*neither of you, nor of others*”(v. 6). Travelling orators and philosophers were common in Paul’s day, moving from place to place to entertain the crowds with enticing and witty words in order to earn both fame and fortune.

However, Paul and his fellow labourers were not taking, but giving of their all. They asked for no financial support but supplied their own needs, “*labouring night and day*”(v. 9) so that they would not be a burden to the Church although, as apostles of Christ, they were entitled to receive some support.

Those who seek leadership in the Church of God today should note well the things that Paul did **not do**, before we address the things he **did do**. Many have made shipwreck because they have not seen their ministry as from God

and under the Lord's scrutiny. In this Laodicean period of Church history the crowd-pleasing covetous preacher may be popular and rich, but he is not following God's pattern for pastors.

HOW TO PERFORM - AS A NURSE

Now Paul reminds the Thessalonians of how he and his fellow-workers ministered to them. As true shepherds, they were gentle and cared for them as a mother would patiently nurse her children. He said:

"We were gentle among you, even as a nurse cherisheth her children" (1 Thess. 2:7).

Paul had a genuine love, a yearning and a longing, to see these spiritual babes fed, cared for, and protected. He stated:

"So being affectionately desirous of you, we were willing to have imparted unto you, not the gospel of God only, but also our own souls, because ye were dear unto us" (1 Thess. 2:8).

It's not only important to share the Gospel with men and women, but also to pour our lives into theirs. Paul's motivation was not just to build a bigger congregation but because these babes in Christ were **"dear unto us"**. This is only possible where there is genuine love. Babes are not toys to be played with but individuals to be loved and cared for.

Church programs are no substitute for personal interest. The real focus should be on people and their needs. Paul's love for the Thessalonians drove him to suffer hardship, working by day and teaching by night so that he would not be a financial burden.

HOW TO PREFORM - AS A FATHER

The care of Paul and Silas for the Thessalonians had not only been gentle as a nurse with a babe, but responsible as a father with his children. Having set a high standard by their own behaviour, they set about seeking to reproduce that behaviour in the believers; behaviour that would be **"worthy of God"**. He reminds them

"how holily and justly and unblameably we behaved ourselves among you that believe: As ye know how we exhorted and comforted and charged every one of you, as a father doth his children, that ye would walk worthy of God, who hath called you unto his kingdom and glory" (1 Thess. 2:10-12).

The role of a father in a household, is to be an example to his children, exhorting, comforting and charging (testifying) them.

A godly example provides a role model and the right environment to exhort,

comfort and testify to developing children. The Greek words for “exhort” and “comfort” both begin with the preposition “para”, meaning “near”, and this suggests instruction that flows from a close personal interest rather than a remote relationship. A true pastor is not a centurion that says, “*Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh*” (Luke 7:8).

COMMENDATION FOR RECEIVING THE WORD OF GOD

It is important to commend where commendation is due, and encouragement, when given at the right time, can stimulate further development in the Christian life. Flattery however will puff up with pride and we need to ensure our commendation is genuine and in the right spirit.

The Thessalonian Christians had faced persecution and suffering for Christ and Paul acknowledged their faithfulness. He praised God for the way in which these people received the Word of God. They had recognised that Paul’s message was not “*the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God*”(v. 13). It was not Paul’s words, but the very Word of God Himself, and as such it conveyed the truth concerning the Gospel.

The New Testament was far from complete when Paul preached at Thessalonica and recognition that his words were not just the words of men but the Word of God, acknowledged Divine inspiration in God-chosen words before the completion of the Canon of Scripture.

When Paul wrote to the Corinthian Church, he stated:

“My speech, and my preaching was not with enticing words of man’s wisdom, but in the demonstration of the Spirit and of power” (1 Cor. 2:4).

Paul was the spokesman, the mouthpiece of the Holy Spirit, preaching only those things that God had given him. His reason was:

“That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God” (1 Cor. 2:5).

Spiritual development can never occur without recognition of the **authority of the Word of God**. It is the Word which, Paul said, “*effectually worketh in you that believe*” (v. 13). The Thessalonians had learned this most important lesson and were commended.

COMMENDATION FOR SUFFERING PERSECUTION

The next commendation was for standing firm in the midst of persecution. Their sufferings are likened to the sufferings of the Churches in Judea, where Christians were suffering at the hands of Jews (1 Thess. 2:14).

The early Church consisted mainly of Jewish converts and many experienced excommunication from the synagogue, physical abuse, and even death at the hands of fellow Jews. James, in his epistle wrote to new Jewish believers:

“My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into divers temptations (encounter various testings), knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience (endurance)” (James 1:2-3).

Suffering is to be expected if history is any gauge. Throughout history the Jews had rejected God’s prophets, crucified God’s Son, and were still persecuting Paul (1 Thess. 2:15).

Later Paul wrote to Timothy:

“Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution” (2 Tim. 3:12).

A godly life will always attract opposition from the world because

“men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil” (John 3:19).

Little did these believers realise how much suffering the Church would yet endure at the hands of ten Roman Emperors. For over two hundred years believers were tortured, thrown to the lions, and killed in the most inhumane manner. Possessions were confiscated and many were banished because they refused to bow to the gods of Rome.

Suffering can come in different forms. Throughout this epistle, by the use of different words, Paul describes the opposition which the Thessalonians experienced.

He speaks of their *“afflictions”*, or pressure from the circumstances (1 Thess. 1:6).

They *“suffered”*, which is the same word used for the sufferings of the Lord Jesus Christ upon the cross (1 Thess. 2:14).

They were *“persecuted”*, or driven out and rejected (1 Thess. 2:15).

The Jews who opposed them were said to be *“contrary”*, like the wind blowing against them (1 Thess. 2:15).

When Paul would have come to visit them Satan *“hindered”* him. The word describes a road so broken up that travel is difficult (1 Thess. 2:18). Obstacles were placed in their path, but these young Christians had received the Word *“with joy of the Holy Ghost”* (1 Thess. 1:6).

Christians still suffer for the name of Christ. Many suffer loss of employment opportunities, some are cast into prison and falsely accused, and there are many martyrs.

As Paul agonised over his desire to be with the Thessalonians in their sufferings he recounts:

*“We, brethren, being **taken from you** for a short time in presence, not in heart, endeavoured the more abundantly to see your face with great desire”* (1 Thess. 2:17).

The word “taken” from you has the sense of “bereavement”. The loss of their fellowship was likened to the parting of loved ones at death.

Paul had an intense longing to visit these young believers and made every effort to see them again and again (1 Thess. 2:17-18), but Satan hindered. This world is Satan’s domain, and he constantly hinders and frustrates the work of God. Only as we watch and pray will we be kept from Satan’s snares.

CROWNS

Finally, Paul assures the believers that Christ will come again and will put down all opposition. **There is nothing more comforting in the hour of trial than the truth of the Lord’s return.**

*“For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? **Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming?** For ye are our glory and joy”* (1 Thess. 2:19-20).

To the Romans Paul wrote:

“For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us” (Rom. 8:18).

A lovely hymn expresses it this way:

When my life-work is ended, And I cross the swelling tide,
When the bright and glorious morning I shall see;
I shall know my Redeemer when I reach the other side,
And His smile will be the first to welcome me.

I shall know Him, I shall know Him, And redeemed by His side I shall stand,
I shall know Him, I shall know Him. By the print of the nails in His hand.

Despite all the trials, all the hardships and discouragements, the journey will be worth it. There are crowns to be won, not kingly diadems (διαδηματα) but wreaths (στεφανους) for those who gain the mastery in the struggle of life.

Paul had won these Thessalonian saints to Christ and could rightly claim the soul-winner’s crown; “a crown of rejoicing”. The Philippians also were his “joy and crown” (Phil. 4:1). At the end of his life he could claim “a crown of righteousness” which is given “to all them that love his appearing” (2 Tim. 4:8). The crown won by the Philadelphian Church was for keeping the “word of my patience”; the truth of

the Lord's return (Rev. 3:10-11) while the crown of life is won by those who are "*tried*" and "*to them that love him*" (James 1:12; Rev. 2:10).

An incorruptible crown is given to those who are "*temperate in all things*" (1 Cor. 9:25) and faithful elders will receive "*a crown of glory that fadeth not away*" (1 Peter 5:4).

Old Testament saints led by 24 elders around the throne received crowns. These were wreaths of gold which were cast down before the throne of God and the Lamb. Crowns (wreaths) are rewards for faithful service.

"For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labor of love, which ye have shewed toward his name" (Heb. 6:10).

Chapter 3 – Ministry to Suffering Saints

- 1 Thess. 3:1-8

“For now we live, if ye stand fast in the Lord” (1 Thess. 3:8).

IN THE first two chapters, Paul explained how the Church at Thessalonica was brought into being and nurtured. Now in chapter 3 he urges them to faithfully stand in the midst of persecution, and to abound in love toward one another and to all men so that they might be established blameless at the coming of the Lord Jesus.

The return of Jesus Christ is the theme of the Epistles to the Thessalonians and Paul takes three steps to help them prepare for that great day.

a) He sends Timothy to exercise pastoral care; b) He writes a letter of encouragement and instruction; and c) He prays *“night and day”* that the things that are lacking in their faith will be perfected.

Circumstances had prevented Paul from returning to Thessalonica, so he and Silas remained in Athens while Timothy journeyed north to Macedonia to encourage the saints. It was a role that Timothy carried out in Corinth (1 Cor. 4:17) and also in Philippi (Phil. 2:19).

How long Timothy spent at Thessalonica we do not know, but it would seem to be a relatively short visit for in verse 6 Paul expresses great joy at the report which Timothy was able to give of the spiritual condition of the saints. He recalls that when Timothy returned he *“brought...good tidings”* of their *“faith and charity”*, and Paul gave thanks to God with joy (vs. 6,9).

APASTOR’S CREDENTIALS.

Although Timothy was only a young man, Paul assured the Church that he was well equipped, and presents his credentials.

First he calls him *“our brother”*. He was a fellow believer in the family of God through the new birth.

Second, he describes Timothy as a *“minister (servant) of God”*.

Third, Paul acknowledges Timothy as a *“fellow labourer in the gospel of Christ”*. He therefore could speak of his competence to encourage the Churches. Paul obviously held Timothy in high esteem, for he wrote to the Philippians:

“I have no man likeminded, who will naturally (sincerely) care for your state”
(Phil. 2:20).

Timothy stands as a pattern for those who would do service for the Lord. Academic qualifications or natural gifts were not the criteria, but spiritual qualifications

were vital. Would to God that Churches would look for these qualities when selecting men for service.

ATTACK FROM EVIL MEN

Timothy's visit to Thessalonica was to establish (strengthen) and comfort (encourage) the believers concerning their faith (1 Thess. 3:2).

Paul was aware of the trials and tribulations that the Church was experiencing and desired "*that no man should be moved by these afflictions*" (1 Thess. 3:3).

The word "*moved*" in the Greek is used of a dog wagging its tail, and paints the picture of the Thessalonians being shaken back and forth by the trials they were experiencing.

These trials were not necessarily a sign that God was displeased with them, nor was He chastising them. They are reminded that "*we are appointed thereunto*" (1 Thess. 3:3), and therefore **must expect** to "*suffer tribulation*" (1 Thess. 3:3-4). This was not a new thought. Paul had previously warned them. He wrote:

"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" (1 Thess. 3:4).

On the night before His crucifixion, the Lord Jesus told His disciples:

"The servant is not greater than his Lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you" (John 15:20).

The world has no love for Christians because they testify of a better life and reject the ways of the world. As a result Christians suffer rejection at the hands of the ungodly.

Paul understood that trials are a natural part of the Christian life. To Timothy, he wrote:

*"Yea, and **all** that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution"* (2 Tim. 3:12).

He was well aware, however, that these new believers needed encouragement to stand firm in the face of opposition, and there was no suggestion that they should negotiate with their persecutors or compromise the truth to avoid persecution. Instead, the Christians should use the trial as an opportunity to "*abound in love one toward another, and toward all men*" (1 Thess. 3:12).

By supporting one another in the hour of trial they demonstrated the love of Christ before the ungodly, and by failing to retaliate or take vengeance on their enemies, all men would understand that God was also longsuffering.

The words of Paul are a timely reminder to us to stand firm in the Lord. Christians are under great pressure to conform to the world's ways; the flesh is constantly

warring against the Spirit and the Spirit against the flesh. We read:

“Be not conformed (pushed into the mould) to this world” (system) (Rom. 12:2).

To the Church at Colosse, Paul wrote:

*“As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him... **Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ**”* (Col. 2:6-8).

ATTACK FROM SATAN

Paul saw the persecution at Thessalonica as Satan’s device. The flame of human hatred was ignited by an unseen enemy, and he sent Timothy back to Thessalonica to reassure himself that they were standing firm in the faith. He wrote:

*“I sent to know your faith, **lest by some means the tempter have tempted you, and our labor be in vain**”* (1 Thess. 3:5).

Satan is described by Paul as the “tempter”. He tempted Eve by weakening her faith in God’s Word with the question, *“Yea, hath God said?”* (Gen. 3:1). In times of testing Satan wants us to doubt the goodness of God and thus be turned aside.

A similar warning is given to the Corinthian Church by Paul:

*“But I fear, **lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ**”* (2 Cor. 11:3).

When the Word of God is sown in the hearts of men some receive it with joy but, like the seed that fell into shallow soil overlaying the rock, when persecution came they withered and bore no fruit. God allows Satan to test men in order to sift the true from the false. The true believer will bear fruit, *“some an hundredfold, some sixtyfold, and some thirtyfold”* (Matt. 13:8).

PAUL’S LITERATURE MINISTRY

After receiving the report from Timothy, Paul wrote this letter of encouragement and instruction which was later recognised by the early Church Fathers as part of the Divinely inspired canon of Scripture. The Holy Spirit in the believers responded to the inspired Word and rejected the many pseudo writings which circulated from 200BC to AD200.

In this portion of Holy Writ Paul reveals truths concerning the resurrection of the *“dead in Christ”*, the unique “body of Christ” in this Church Age (1 Thess. 4:13-16).

He speaks specifically in chapter 4 of the translation of the **living saints** of this Church age (1 Thess. 4:17), and indicates in 1 Thess. 5:1-10 that these believers are not appointed to the wrath of the day of the Lord, the Great Tribulation.

We owe much to the Thessalonian Christians, whose love for Paul and faithful

testimony were used of God to excite the Apostle to record these valuable truths concerning the resurrection and translation of the Church.

Satan hates the Word of God, and many times attempted to destroy it throughout the period known to historians as “the ten pagan persecutions” (AD64 to AD311). Thousands of manuscripts were burned and Christians died when found in possession of the Scriptures.

The Dark Ages from AD600 – 1600 followed. It was called the Devil’s Millennium. The official Church **forbade the reading** of the Word of God and the clergy interpreted Scripture for the people. But God raised up men like Martin Luther, who is best remembered for declaring the truth that justification in the sight of God is by faith, and not by works.

By 1533 Luther translated the New Testament Scriptures into the German language, and the Old Testament by 1534. By 1574 one hundred thousand copies had been sold. In spite of Papal efforts to burn and ban God’s Word it was available to the common man. God has ensured that the written Word was preserved so that we might know the Truth.

Today Christians rarely read the Bible, sermons are preached with little Biblical content. The Word of God is no longer central in Church services and most do not take their Bible to Church. Responsive, public reading of Scripture is made impossible by the proliferation of modern versions. The Charismatics have added to Scripture with claims of extra-Biblical revelation; dreams, visions and fake prophecies. When so many have suffered and died to make this precious book available, it is tragic to see it doubted, denied and disobeyed.

Dear friend, learn to read, obey and trust God’s Word. The Bible is God’s unchanging revelation to His people for all ages. When the Pharisees came to Christ questioning Him, He said,

“Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures.”

The Bible is God’s final revelation to man. All God has to say to man today is recorded in the Bible, nothing can be added to it and nothing taken from it and that is why we need to know what is in it. It was vital to the Thessalonians, and it is vital to us today.

PAUL’S PRAYER FOR THE THESSALONIANS

Finally, Paul prayed for the Thessalonians. The Apostles saw prayer and the Word as their main responsibility when they chose Spirit-filled men to take care of the administrative affairs of the Church. They said they would give themselves *“continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word”* (Acts 6:4).

Paul’s prayer was fourfold.

1) That he might see the Thessalonians again.

*“That we might **see your face**” and that the Lord might “direct our way unto you” (1 Thess. 3:10-11).*

2) That he “*might perfect* (equip, furnish) *that which was lacking in their faith*” (1 Thess. 3:10).

Faith is an ongoing experience in the life of a believer; there is always need for growth. One writer has likened faith to a muscle; it gets stronger with use. To this end Paul prayed earnestly and frequently, night and day, that they might be fully equipped.

3) That their love might abound.

*“The Lord make you to increase and **abound in love** one toward another and toward all men” (1 Thess. 3:12).*

The Thessalonians were already showing love to others, but Paul wanted it to increase. There is always room for improvement in the Christian life. Until we get to glory we will never achieve absolute perfection. Growth in faith ought to result in a growing love for others, not only for fellow believers but also for “*all men*”.

When Joseph’s brothers sold him into bondage he suffered for 13 years, but we read of his love for his family when they came down to Egypt.

He said:

“Now therefore be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that ye sold me hither: for God did send me before you to preserve life” (Gen. 45: 5).

Paul also suffered greatly at the hands of fellow Jews, and they persecuted him from city to city, but he could say:

“I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh” (Rom. 9:3).

May we learn to love those who “*despitefully use us*”, for the sake of the gospel.

4) That the Thessalonians would be

*“**unblameable in holiness** before God...at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ **with all his saints**” (1 Thess. 3:13).*

Unblameable does not mean we are sinless, but it does mean we are dealing with sin. Sin should never be covered up or harboured in the life of a believer. Our life before the world should give no occasion for blame that would dishonour our Lord.

When John dealt with the subject of preserving fellowship with God, he wrote:

“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9).

We do not confess in order to regain our salvation, but to regain fellowship;

“That your joy may be full” (1 John 1:4).

When the Lord Jesus Christ returns at His second coming, all the saints will come with Him to share in that great victory. The bride, the Church, will be

“arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness (righteous acts) of saints” (Rev. 19:8).

At conversion God imputes to us Christ’s righteousness, but when Christ returns He will be glorified by **the righteous deeds of the believers**. How important it is that we keep our garments unspotted, and our lives unblameable before God. Then when we appear with Christ at His glorious appearing, He will be *“admired in all them that believe”* (2 Thess. 1:10).

These are the things Paul prayed for and they are the things we need to pray about.

Chapter 4

The Will of God - 1 Thess. 4:1-12

“For God hath not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness” (1 Thess. 4:7).

IN THE closing verses of chapter three prominent words stand out: holiness, love, and coming. These are the subjects of chapter 4 and we are reminded that the truth of the Lord’s return, when rightly understood, will lead to godly behaviour.

HOLINESS THAT FULFILS GOD’S WILL

In the opening verse Paul exhorts his hearers to walk worthy of their calling. Paul often describes the Christian’s life as a “walk”, and as we know, every walk begins with the first step. For the Christian, that is the step of faith; *“For we walk by faith, not by sight”* (2 Cor. 5:7). It is a step that begins by accepting Christ as our personal Saviour. However, if our daily walk is to be in complete fellowship with God, and our fellow man, all hindrances must be removed.

“If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin”

(1 John 1:7).

In the story of Pilgrim’s Progress, you will have noticed that every time Pilgrim strayed from the pathway that led to the Eternal City he ended up in trouble. So often the byway looked easy and attractive, but it always led to problems. The Christian life is not always an easy path to tread, but the alternatives are only easy for a short time, as Pilgrim found out, and always lead to greater difficulties in the end.

It is God’s will for us that we are a sanctified people, that is, a people set apart for Divine use and service.

*“For **this is the will of God, even your sanctification**, that ye should abstain from fornication: That every one of you should know how to possess (control) his vessel **in sanctification** and honour; Not in the lust of concupiscence (passion of lust), even as the Gentiles which know not God... For **God hath not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness**”* (1 Thess. 4:3-7).

It is important to remember that there are two aspects to sanctification: positional and practical sanctification. The first is a sanctification that comes as a result of Christ’s completed work on the cross.

“By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ

once for all" (Heb. 10:10).

In another sense, Christians should sanctify themselves, that is, separate themselves from all forms of sin. This practical or progressive sanctification is something that will continue in the life of every born again person until death, or till the Lord returns. It is this practical sanctification that Paul is talking about in these verses.

The specific sin against which Paul is warning is the sin of unlawful sexual acts, which was prevalent in the ancient Greek world and hellenistic culture glorified nudity. These Christians had grown up in a world that was obsessed with the human body, and its pagan worship often involved sexual rites.

When John wrote to the Church at Thyatira in the Book of the Revelation, he said:

"But thou sufferest that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication" (Rev. 2:20).

Jezebel, the wife of Ahab, was one of the most evil women in the Old Testament. She was responsible for corrupting the nation of Israel by teaching them to combine the worship of Baal with the worship of God. The message to Thyatira mentions a prophetess who was teaching that Christians could combine their worship of God with sexual rites and idolatry.

Thyatira was a centre of trade associations, organisations known as guilds, and a considerable number of them existed. There were the bankers, bronze-smiths, wool and linen workers, potters, tanners, carpenters, and dyers' guilds, just to name a few. To have a successful business one needed to be a member of the guild and attend the guild meetings on a regular basis.

These guilds met in the local temple. The meeting generally commenced with the offering of drink offerings to pagan gods and was followed by a meal largely of meat that had been offered to idols. This in turn was followed by participation in immoral sexual acts.

Life therefore was very difficult for Christians, but this prophetess was showing them how to be a "Christian" and also participate in these meetings. God gave her the opportunity to repent, but she refused, and so God said:

"I will cast her (the prophetess) into a bed (of suffering); and them that commit adultery with her into great tribulation" (Rev. 2:22).

Prophetically this Church is a picture of Christendom commencing in AD600 with Pope Gregory the Great and the establishment of the papacy which has continued to our time. It is also known for its idolatry and immorality.

The final judgment of this system, described as a “harlot”, will occur when the ten kings of the revived Roman Empire “*make her desolate and naked, and shall eat her flesh, and burn her with fire*” (Rev. 17:16).

Paul warned the Corinthian Church on sexual matters when he wrote:

“Now the body is not for fornication, but for the Lord” (1 Cor. 6:13).

He reminds them that their body is the dwelling place of the Spirit of God.

“What? Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost”
(1 Cor. 6:19).

Never has Paul’s warning been more relevant than today. Much of our society is sex-obsessed. It is a major tool in advertising and television programs, and sadly it has become a blight in the Church as well. Many of us are saddened and concerned with the increasing number of sexual sins that are being committed by Church leaders and members throughout Christendom. It is a sin that has a ripple effect upon all that are touched by it.

One of Britain’s most gifted writers of the nineteenth century, Oscar Wilde, left his lovely wife to engage in homosexuality, and as a result of the disgrace and imprisonment he suffered, he wrote these words:

“The gods have given me almost everything. But I let myself be lured into long spells of senseless and sensual ease...Tired of being on the heights, I deliberately went to the depths in search for new sensation...I grew careless of the lives of others. I took pleasure where it pleased me and passed on. I forgot that every little action of the common day makes or unmakes character, and that therefore what one has done in the secret chamber, one has some day to cry aloud from the housetop. I ceased to be lord over myself. I was no longer the captain of my soul, and did not know it. I allowed pleasure to dominate me. I ended in horrible disgrace.”

There is a heavy price to pay for immoral conduct, whether a person is saved or unsaved. Oscar Wilde grew careless of the lives of others and paid dearly, just as Paul warned in verse 6.

*“That no man go beyond and defraud his brother in any matter: because that **the Lord is the avenger of all such**, as we also have forewarned you and testified”* (1 Thess. 4:6).

Sexual sins have consequences for all the parties involved.

“For none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself” (Rom. 14:7).

However, immoral behaviour is not just against others; it despises the temple of God and is against God, because

“God... hath also given unto us his Holy Spirit” (v. 8).

The Holy Spirit indwelling the believer is offended by immoral behaviour.

LOVE FOR OTHERS

In the natural realm animals do by instinct what is necessary for survival. Fish do not learn to swim; they do it because it is in their nature. And because a Christian is a partaker of the Divine nature (2 Peter 1:4) and God is love,

“He that loveth not, knoweth not God; for God is love” (1John 4:8).

Christians will manifest love towards others because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit. Paul’s request was not that they might learn to love, but that love would **increase**.

“But we beseech you, brethren, that you increase more and more”

(1 Thess. 4:10).

A TESTIMONY TO UNBELIEVERS

The exhortation to increase in love one toward another must not be an excuse for lazy people to impose on others. Paul speaks about this problem in his second epistle:

“We hear that there are some which walk among you disorderly, working not at all, but are busybodies. Now them that are such we command and exhort by our Lord Jesus Christ, that with quietness they work, and eat their own bread” (2 Thess.

3:10-12).

In fact Paul says that

“if any man obey not our word...have no company with him, that he may be ashamed” (2 Thess. 3:14).

In the course of my employment I visited a company in Fiji to train employees in new processes so that the product range could be expanded.

There are many Christians in Fiji, and church attendance is high. One day I set some tasks for employees, but when I returned to check progress I found that the process had not been commenced and the person involved was sitting at a table reading the Bible. While one applauds his desire to study the Scriptures, it was an abysmal testimony to the company that was paying his salary.

As Christians, our application at work should be exemplary, and Paul in this letter encourages the saints to aspire to do three things.

(1) Don’t seek the limelight.

“Study to be quiet” (1 Thess. 4:11).

Again forgive me for adding a personal note. I had two large promotions in my business career, neither of which I applied for, nor sought after. Both, I believe, came as a result of just doing my job to the very best of my ability.

Reader, if today you are in a position where you are looking for advancement or you are dissatisfied with your work, let me counsel you: just keep working to the very best of your ability, committing it to God in prayer, and God will look after the rest. It may be that God will move you on, or it could even be that God wants you to remain in that position. His will is best.

“Godliness with contentment is great gain” (1 Tim. 6:6).

(2) Don't be a busybody.

“Do your own business” (1 Thess. 4:11).

Paul tells his readers to keep out of others affairs. Idle hands and minds become tools of the Devil. If you are busy and gainfully employed you won't have time to involve yourself unnecessarily in other peoples' affairs.

3) Be self-supporting.

“Work with your own hands” (1 Thess. 4:11).

The culture of the day despised hard work, and most of the manual tasks were relegated to slaves. It is estimated that in the Roman Empire at this time there were over sixty million slaves.

In addition, many may have misunderstood the teaching of Paul concerning the return of the Lord. They could have reasoned that as the return of the Lord was imminent, why bother to work? Why not sit back and wait for it to happen? But as the days and weeks went by and money and food ran out, these believers were becoming a burden on others.

True faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and the promise of His return, does not mean we abandon our responsibilities to await His coming.

Just prior to riding into Jerusalem to show Himself as the King of Israel, Jesus told a parable concerning the departure of a king who gave ten of his servants money to invest. On his return he demanded to know how they had honoured his trust and increased his money. One increased it by 1000% another by 500%, but, another made no gain at all. The parable is for Israel but its message is in the words *“Occupy till I come”*. In Luke 19:11-27 the literal Greek may read, *“be investing while I am coming.”*

The Lord also provides each of us equal opportunity to invest with the talents that He has given as we wait for His return.

William Miller, the forerunner of the Seventh Day Adventist Movement, predicted that Jesus would return in 1843. Some of his followers resigned their jobs, sold their possessions, and went out onto a hilltop to await the Lord's arrival. Some posted signs in shop windows, but when Christ did not return they appeared foolish. Paul reminds the Thessalonians to

“work with your own hands...that ye might walk honestly (decently) toward them that are without” (1 Thess. 4:12).

Sanctification is very practical. How we conduct our lives as Christians is our greatest testimony to unbelievers. Paul wrote:

“See that you walk circumspectly (diligently and carefully) not as fools, but as wise. Redeeming the time, (buying up the opportunities) because the days are evil” (Eph. 5:15-16).

It is worthy of note that in the epistles to the Thessalonians which say most about the Rapture of the Church we have very practical instruction on sanctified living. Let us keep looking for the Lord's return, but continue to be industrious, working and witnessing for Him, so that Christ's name will be glorified.

Chapter 5

The Rapture of the Church -

1 Thess. 4:13-18

“And so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words” (1 Thess. 4:17-18).

IN HIS first epistle to the Thessalonians (1 Thess. 4:13-18) Paul is dealing with the blessed hope that should comfort every believer. He gives details that had never previously been revealed to man.

Before the Church came into existence Scripture gave no indication that **living people** would be part of a resurrection. It was, however, clearly understood that there would be a resurrection of the body and, as Job indicated, this would be *“in the latter day”* (Job 19:25-27).

Daniel also wrote that in the last days there would be a resurrection of *“some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt”* (Dan. 12:2). Both saved and unsaved would be raised.

The idea of a resurrection in the last days is reflected in Martha’s reply to Jesus, when he told her:

“Thy brother (Lazarus) shall rise again.” She replied, *“I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day”* (John 11:23-24).

During his visit to Thessalonica Paul had obviously taught truths concerning the resurrection of the believers. We do not know when these facts were revealed to him, but Paul says:

*“For this we say unto you **by the word of the Lord**”* (1 Thess. 4:15).

Four or five years later, AD56/57, Paul wrote from Ephesus to the Corinthian Church and confirmed:

“Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye...” (1 Cor. 15:51-52).

This, he states, was a *“mystery”* which had **not been previously revealed**.

Paul’s revelation was direct from God, and it is important to remember that he is addressing his remarks to **Christians**. In 1 Thess. 4:14-15 he talks of those who *“sleep in Jesus”*, and *“the dead in Christ.”* In Rev. 20:15 and Matt. 25:41 God reveals the eternal destination of the unsaved. Antichrist’s followers are slain and raised to *“shame and everlasting contempt”* at the *“throne of his glory”* and the rest of the unsaved are raised before the *“great white throne”* at the end of the Millennium.

A second point to remember is that Paul is talking about **the body**. The Bible does not teach that the soul sleeps at death. In Luke 16:19-31 the souls of the rich man and Lazarus were both very conscious in “sheol” after death.

Paul states that for the Christian to die is to “*be with Christ*”, which is “*far better*” (Phil. 1:23). The soul of the believer is with Christ at the very moment of death. In this passage, however, Paul describes the **body of a Christian**, at death, as being asleep.

The early Christians described the graveyard as “a resting place for pilgrims and strangers”, and our English word “cemetery” comes from the same Greek root, which means a resting place. When we go to sleep at night and awake in the morning it is a mini picture of bodily death and subsequent resurrection.

Now Paul’s main reason for writing to the Thessalonian Christians was because some had not clearly grasped the truths they had been taught. These believers were concerned because while they waited for Christ to return some had died.

COMFORT FOR THE BEREAVED

For the believer, death separates us from loved ones for just a while, but we will be raised together. So Paul tells them to “*sorrow not, even as others which have no hope*” (1 Thess. 4:13). Paul does not tell them to sorrow, but **not** to sorrow as those that have no hope.

The death of a loved one or near friend brings sorrow to our heart; it is a natural response. But this message was of particular importance to the new Church in Greece.

Greek philosophy taught that there was no assurance of life after death. So when Paul preached on Mars Hill in Athens concerning the resurrection of Jesus Christ, his message brought ridicule.

“When they heard of the resurrection of the dead some mocked: and others said, We will hear thee again of this matter” (Acts 17:32).

An inscription on a Greek grave read:

“I was not, I became, I am not, I care not”; in other words, “no hope”.

Thus Paul’s message is not only to correct misunderstanding, but also to counter a prevailing Greek philosophy of the time. The message of Christ’s return for His Church is a source of comfort and hope in bereavement.

The hope of resurrection is based on the fact that the Lord Jesus Christ rose from the dead. Indeed this was the great message of the Book of Acts; the Apostles preached the death, burial, and resurrection of our Lord. To preach His death alone is only half of the salvation story. Paul wrote:

“As in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive” (1 Cor. 15:22).

Having introduced the subject of resurrection, Paul then goes on to explain the order in which events will take place. He assures these believers that those who have passed away will not be left out when Christ comes for His Church. He tells them, in fact, that those who have died *“in Christ”* will rise **first**.

“For we which are alive, and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not precede them which are asleep” (1 Thess. 4:15).

However, the event will be instantaneous. To the Corinthian Church, Paul said it would be *“in a moment”*. The Greek word indicates an indivisible period of time, an atom of time. It will be *“in the twinkling of an eye”*, a minute milli-second, and all will be over. The world will not see us go; all they will know is that **people are missing**.

This is one proof that the Rapture of the Church and the Second Coming are separate events. Christ’s second coming is highly visible, for *“every eye shall see him”* (Rev. 1:7).

“They shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory” (Matt 24:30).

At the Rapture, the Church is *“caught up”* to meet the Lord in the air and be with Christ, but at His second coming, His saints come *“with him”* (1 Thess. 3:13). Zechariah tells us:

“The LORD my God shall come, and ALL the saints with thee” (Zech. 14:5).

Another proof that this event is not the Second Advent is that **only the dead “in Christ” rise at this time**. Old Testament saints rose with Christ (Matt. 27:51-53), and they were never *“in Christ”*. Tribulation saints rise when Christ returns at the end of the Tribulation (Rev. 20:4), and they cannot be described as *“in Christ”*. Those who are *“in Christ”* are exclusively the Church, which has been *“baptised by one Spirit into one body”* (1 Cor 12:13).

The Church is the body of Christ made up of all who are “in Christ Jesus”.

THE RAPTURE WILL BE A REUNION.

In verse 14 we read:

“them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him”.

We have already seen that the souls of believers in this Church age depart to be with Christ at death. So when Christ comes for His Bride, the **souls** of the departed must come **with Him** to be reunited with their body in resurrection power. Spirit, soul and body will be reunited at the Rapture, just as Christ’s soul was reunited with His body on the resurrection morning.

As the deceased Christians receive their incorruptible body and the living

Christians receive their immortal body there will be a glorious eternal reunion:

“Caught up together...in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord” (1 Thess. 4:17).

THREE SOUNDS

There are three almost simultaneous announcements at the Rapture. This may emphasise the certainty and completion of the message, but each has its significance. There will be the shout of the Lord, the voice of the archangel Michael, and *“the trump of God”*.

Christ’s shout is “a shout of command”, according to the interlinear New Testament, and we are told what that shout will be in Rev. 4:1. It is, *“Come up hither!”* This is the *“high calling”*, or *“upward call”* toward which Paul was striving (Phil. 3:14). Instantaneously, the Church will be raptured through the door of heaven to be for ever with the Lord.

Secondly, Michael’s voice is heard. He is the

“great prince which standeth for the children of thy (Daniel’s) people” (Dan. 12:1).

Once the Church is removed, Michael will have work to do, sealing the 144,000 Jewish servants of God (Rev. 7:1-8) to preach the Gospel of the Kingdom in the first half of the Tribulation. The Tribulation is the *“time of Jacob’s trouble”* (Jer. 30:7).

Thirdly, *“the trump of God”* will sound. There has been much speculation over what trumpet will be sounded. In the Book of Numbers we are told that Israel was instructed to make two silver trumpets. These were long silver tubes flared at the end, similar to those shown on the cover of the Herald of Hope. We know this from Jewish coins that have been found bearing these pictures.

The trumpets were used to gather the people to the tabernacle for instruction from God, to summon the princes to the Tabernacle, or to indicate when the camp should move on their journey through the wilderness. They were also used to sound an alarm in the day of battle.

Finally, as they prepared the sacrifices it was an integral part of their worship (Num. 10:10). On the first day of the seventh month Israel held the **feast of trumpets** at which a ram’s horn shofar was blown to summon the people to leave the fields and prepare for the feast of “Yom Kippur”, the day of atonement ten days later (Lev. 23:24-25).

Many link these passages to the trumpet call. But Paul called it the *“last trump”* in 1 Cor. 15:52, and as Paul used military terms in his letters to teach spiritual truths, it may well refer to the practice of the Roman Legion which gave three trumpet blasts to mobilise its soldiers.

The first trumpet blast required the camp to pack up. A second trumpet blast summoned the soldiers to assemble in their ranks, and the last and final trumpet sent them on their journey.

Whatever the explanation, these three calls will be the means by which the redemption of God's people, the Church, takes place. No longer will we be pilgrims and strangers in a foreign land, but citizens of heaven, as described by Peter in 1 Peter 2:11.

WHY CALL IT THE RAPTURE?

It has often been said that the word "rapture" does not occur in the Bible. But the Greek word for "*caught up*" in verse 17 is the word *rapturo* in the Latin language. This is translated as *rapture* in our English language. The Greek word means "**to catch away, or snatch away**".

In the Book of Acts this word was used when Paul, on one occasion, had to be rescued by the soldiers when he was in danger from the angry crowd at Jerusalem.

*"The chief captain...commanded the soldiers to go down, and to **take him by force** from among them, and to bring him into the castle"* (Acts 23:10).

The "*castle*" was the soldiers' barracks in the Tower of Antonia adjacent to the Temple. Paul was "snatched away" by the soldiers and taken into the safety of the Tower.

What an apt description of the Rapture, for immediately after the Church is taken away the Tribulation will begin. The Church will be delivered before these events take place.

Notice also that the meeting will be with the Lord "*in the air*". Satan is "*the prince of the power of the air*" (Eph. 2:2). The Church will ascend triumphantly through Satan's domain.

Concerning this great event, one writer has said: "There is a sound to hear, a sight to see, a miracle to experience, a meeting to enjoy, and a comfort to feel." What a blessed anticipation!

Sadly, many Christians today do not believe that the Church will be raptured before the Tribulation. Many think that we are either living in the Tribulation period now, or that the Tribulation has already passed into history, or even more tragically, that the Church will yet go through the Tribulation before Christ returns.

To say that the Tribulation is a past or present event is hard to fathom, for Scripture describes it as a time of unprecedented conflict in the natural realm, such as has not been recorded in past history and which will occur **immediately before the visible return of Christ** in the heavens (Matt. 24:29-30).

We only need to read from chapter 6 to chapter 19 of the Book of Revelation to see the horrific events described, and then ask the question, Has there ever been a seven-year period of history when sequentially all of these events took place? The answer has to be NO!

The Church will not have to go through these great sufferings. The Scriptures tell us that the Tribulation is a time of God's wrath against a world that has broken His law and rejected His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ (Rev. 6:16). Twice in this epistle, Paul tells the Thessalonians that salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ will deliver Christians from that wrath. We

*"wait for His Son...Jesus...which delivered us from **the wrath to come**"* (1 Thess. 1:10), and *"God hath **not appointed us to wrath**, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ"* (1 Thess. 5:9).

The last seven years before Christ returns to reign belong to Israel. Those *"in Christ"* must depart first.

We trust dear reader that you have experienced the New Birth and are therefore *"in Christ"* and safe from the *"wrath to come"*.

Chapter 6

The Day of the Lord - 1 Thess. 5:1-28

“For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night” (1 Thess. 5:2).

HAVING previously answered the question of how the Rapture of the living Church Age saints will take place in 1 Thess. 4:13-18, and having given details of how *“the dead in Christ”* will be raised, Paul addressed the question of **WHEN** these events will take place and the impact it will have on the world. He does this in 1 Thess. 5:1-11.

In opening the subject of **when** the Lord will return, Paul uses a phrase, *“the times and the seasons”*. It is an expression that is used in only two other places throughout Scripture. The first is in Dan. 2:21, where Daniel said:

*“Blessed be the name of God for ever ...he changeth **the times and seasons**: he removeth kings, and setteth up kings...”*

This statement was made at a time when God revealed to Daniel the meaning of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream which described the kingdoms of the world from the Babylonian Empire to Christ’s Millennial Kingdom. The other instance occurs in Acts 1:7, where the disciples met with Christ on the Mount of Olives just before He ascended. They asked,

*“Lord, wilt thou **at this time** restore again the kingdom to Israel?”* and He replied, *“It is not for you to know **the times or the seasons.**”*

This second occurrence is in relation to Israel’s restoration and the coming Millennial Kingdom. *“Blindness in part is happened to Israel, **until** the fulness of the Gentiles be come in”* (Rom. 11:25), so the Rapture of the Church will indicate that the conversion and restoration of Israel is at hand.

GOD HAS A PLAN

Since the time of Abraham, God has had a plan for Abraham’s descendants that will bring them into blessing and favour with Him. But on a number of occasions God has postponed that program because of disobedience and unbelief. The *“times and seasons”* are in the Father’s hands.

In Daniel chapter 9 God revealed His plan for the nation of Israel, from the time of the decree to restore and build Jerusalem (445BC) after the Babylon captivity right up until the establishment of the Millennial Kingdom. The prophecy has three stages. The second stage took them up to the presentation of Christ as their King on Palm Sunday. This event was to be followed by Messiah’s death, and later, the destruction of Jerusalem (AD 70).

The third stage would begin when Antichrist, a Roman prince, would confirm a covenant with Israel for a period of 7 years. The New Testament reveals that during that delay God would establish His Church, the Bride of Christ, and that He would remove the Church from the world **before** God's program for Israel recommenced.

Dr. A.T. Pierson wrote: "History is His (God's) Story." God has ordained times and seasons, not only for the Church, but also for the nations of the world and especially for His chosen people, Israel.

THE DAY OF THE LORD IS IN GOD'S PLAN

Paul states that he had no need to write to them concerning when the Rapture, described in chapter 4, would occur. He had already told them but he nevertheless records the matter.

*"But of **the times and seasons**, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you. For yourselves know perfectly that **the day of the Lord** so cometh as a thief in the night."*

The phrase "*the day of the Lord*." is important. It can refer to any period of time **when God acts in judgment** upon people or nations, however, each usage of the expression is determined by the context in which the phrase is used. The context of our passage is the Rapture of the Church and the judgments that follow.

In end-time prophecy it is a phrase that generally relates to the Great Tribulation period and sometimes stretches into the Millennial Kingdom. It is a time when God will judge the world and punish the nations that have rejected Him. But it will also be a time when Israel is prepared for the return of Jesus Christ and the establishment of His kingdom.

Zephaniah paints an awful picture of the Day of the Lord when he states:

*"**The great day of the LORD** is... a day of wrath, a day of trouble and distress, a day of wasteness and desolation, a day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness... And I will bring distress upon men, that they shall walk like blind men, because they have sinned against the Lord: and their blood shall be poured out as dust, and their flesh as the dung" (Zeph. 1:14-15, 17).*

Jeremiah described the Day of the LORD as "*the time of Jacob's trouble*" (Jer. 30:7), because of the fearful events that will befall **the nation of Israel** during that period. The Book of The Revelation, from chapters 6-18, describes the events of this seven-year period that will have no equal in the history of the world. Only Israel and the Gentile nations are mentioned in these chapters. The Church is removed in chapter 4 and returns with Christ in chapter 19 as the wife of the Lamb (Rev. 19:7-9).

THE NEED TO BE PREPARED

Paul then goes on to say that “*the day of the Lord*” will come “*as a thief in the night*”, that is, it will come when it is **least expected** and at a time when the world is unprepared.

The Day of the Lord is described in Matthew 24 as the “*end of the age*”, a time of “*great tribulation*”. On the Mount of Olives the disciples asked the Lord,

*“When shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of **the end of the world (age)**”* (Matt. 24:3).

The Lord gave many signs that would indicate to Israel when the end of the age had come but as to when it would begin He stated:

*“But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but **my Father only**”* (Matt. 24:36).

It was for **the Father alone** to decide, and that time had not been revealed to the angels of heaven, nor even to the Lord Jesus Christ himself. It is the Father’s prerogative to determine the times and seasons (Matt. 24:36; Mark13:32; Acts 1:7).

In Matthew chapter 24 and Luke 17 Jesus likens the day of the Lord to the days of Noah. For a hundred years Noah was building the Ark as a sign of coming judgment, but people refused to heed the warning and repent of their sin. Finally Noah had only seven days to load the animals into the Ark before the door of opportunity was closed. Christ then issues the warning:

“Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come” (Matt. 24:36-42).

Just as Noah was placed securely in the Ark to escape the impending judgment, so the Church will be removed at the Rapture **before the judgment of God begins to fall** on the earth.

Likewise Lot was removed **before** the fire of God’s wrath fell on Sodom (Luke17:28-30). The angel made it clear that judgment could not fall while Lot was in Sodom.

*“Haste thee, escape thither; for I cannot do any thing **TILL** thou be come thither”* (Gen. 19:22).

It is a tragedy that some have not listened to these Scriptures. William Miller, a lay Baptist minister in the USA, after a study of Daniel chapters 8 and 9 in which he changed days into years, concluded that the return of the Lord would take place in 1843. When the Lord did not come, he changed his calculation to late 1844. When 1844 passed and Christ had not returned, Miller abandoned his

position admitting that he had been wrong.

On William Miller's tombstone these words were engraved: "At the appointed time, the end shall be." Although this probably referred to the fact of his death, it was also a true statement of his doctrinal error.

More tragic, however, is the fact that others took his wrong calculation and compounded it with further errors which brought the Seventh Day Adventist Church into being. It is dangerous to set times and dates when God has clearly said no man knows when Christ will return.

WHEN WILL THE DAY OF THE LORD COME?

The Tribulation will commence with confirmation of a covenant with "many" in the Middle East, that will bring peace to the region. The world will be deceived by the cry, "Peace and safety!"

As the twenty-first century progresses the picture in the Middle East is distressing. Islam is flexing its muscle and Russia provides arms for terrorist nations threatening Israel.

The day of the Lord will begin as the world cries, "Peace and safety". However, that peace will be short-lived and worldwide conflict will follow. At the same time God's judgments will begin to fall, and Paul uses the picture of a woman giving birth to a child to describe the catastrophic events that will follow.

The delivery of a child, my wife testifies, involves pain, and that pain increases until the child is finally delivered. Paul states:

*"Then sudden destruction cometh upon **them**, as travail upon a woman with child; and **they** shall not escape"* (1 Thess. 5:3).

Jesus described the first half of the seven-year Tribulation as the "beginning of sorrows" (Matt. 24:8). The Greek word translated "sorrows" is the same word translated "travail" in 1 Thess. 5:3.

Isaiah wrote of the conversion of Israel in the Last Days and stated:

*"Before she (Zion) travailed, she brought forth; before her pain came, she was delivered of a man child. Who hath heard such a thing? who hath seen such things? Shall the earth be made to bring forth **in one day**? or shall a nation be born at once? **for as soon as Zion travailed, she brought forth her children.***

Shall I bring to the birth, and not cause to bring forth? saith the LORD: shall I cause to bring forth, and shut the womb? saith thy God.

Rejoice ye with Jerusalem, and be glad with her, all ye that love her: rejoice for joy with her, all ye that mourn for her" (Isa. 66:7-10).

Before Israel travailed she brought forth the “*man child*”, the Lord Jesus, but when the Tribulation comes the nation will travail and be “born again”. It will be the “*time of Jacob’s trouble*”. Jeremiah likens that Tribulation to travail.

*“Ask ye now, and see whether a man doth **travail with child?** wherefore do I see every man with his hands on his loins, as a woman in travail, and all faces are turned into paleness? Alas! for **that day is great, so that none is like it: it is even the time of Jacob’s trouble, but he shall be saved out of it**”* (Jer. 30:6-7).

During the Tribulation the nations will experience a similar development. It will start with a short period of peace, but it will not be long before conflicts and catastrophies engulf the whole world. These will increase in number, frequency, and intensity until the full seven years are accomplished.

When once the process of childbirth has begun the result is inevitable; it cannot be reversed and it will continue until the child is delivered. So it is with the Tribulation. Once it commences it cannot be stopped; it will run its course for the full seven years as God has predetermined.

CHRISTIANS WILL NOT PASS INTO THE DAY OF THE LORD

Paul addressed the Christians:

*“But ye, brethren, are not in darkness that **THAT DAY** should overtake you as a thief.”*

Why? Firstly because they had the Scriptures of the prophets such as Amos, Joel, Isaiah, and Daniel, as well as the teaching of Christ and Paul to tell them what will transpire. But most importantly, because we are not appointed to the Day of the Lord.

*“For **God hath not appointed us to wrath**, but to obtain salvation (deliverance) by our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, that, whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with him”* (1 Thess. 5:9-10).

In the context of 1 Thessalonians 4 and 5, the “*wrath*” referred to is the “*day of the Lord*” (1 Thess. 5:2). Whether we are alive (*wake*) or are dead (*sleep*) at that time, we will be raptured before the Day of the Lord and “*live together with him*”: “*So shall we ever be with the Lord*” (1 Thess. 4:17).

Our response should be to comfort and edify one another until “*the Lord himself shall descend from heaven*” and we hear the commanding shout, “*Come up hither.*” With our departed loved ones who “*sleep in Jesus*”, we will rise in resurrection power to be with Christ for all eternity. This is our “*blessed hope*”.

It would be no comfort to know that we were to live through the Day of the Lord. It is great comfort to know that we are not appointed to the Day of the Lord.

HOW TO BEHAVE IN LIGHT OF HIS COMING

It has often been said by those who oppose the truth of the Rapture of the Church, that we should be more concerned about how we live now than about looking for the Lord to come. This accusation shows gross ignorance of God's Word and is symptomatic of a serious flaw in the understanding of those who say such things. Any honest student of God's Word will acknowledge that wherever the Lord's return is mentioned in Scripture it is the basis of encouragement or an appeal to greater watchfulness and faithfulness.

In 1 Thessalonians chapter 5 we have one of the most comprehensive exhortations to practical holiness in the Bible and it is predicated on the truth that the Church is not appointed to the Day of the Lord! We might call it the fourteen commandments for believers who wait for the Lord's return. The passage begins with, "*Wherefore...*" That is, **In view of the fact that we are not appointed to the wrath of the Day of the Lord**, this is how we should behave.

The Greek word translated "*Wherefore*" is "dio" which means, "consequently" and is translated, "*for this cause*" in 2 Cor. 4:16.

Paul beseeches and exhorts the saints to:

- 1) "*Comfort yourselves together, and edify one another...*" (v. 11).
- 2) Support those who are the elders and "*love them for their work's sake*". He adds, "*And be at peace among yourselves*" (vs. 12-13).
- 3) Warn the "*unruly*" (insubordinate) and support the weak (v. 14).
- 4) Don't "*render evil for evil unto any man*" (v. 15).
- 5) "*Rejoice evermore*" (v. 16).
- 6) "*Pray without ceasing*" (v. 17).
- 7) "*In everything give thanks*" (v. 18).
- 8) "*Quench not the Spirit*" (v. 19).
- 9) "*Despise not prophesyings*" (v. 20). The temporary gift of prophecy was still in existence. Paul wrote, "*We prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect (complete) is come, then that which in part shall be done away*" (1 Cor. 13:9-10). When the canon of Scripture was complete the gift of prophecy would "*fail*". Historically it ceased with the passing of John. (See the book *Tongues Shall Cease*, by John R Ecob)
- 10) "*Prove all things; hold fast to that which is good*" (v. 21).
- 11) "*Abstain from all appearance of evil*" (v. 22).

12) “Pray for us” (v. 25).

13) “Greet all the brethren with a holy kiss” (v. 26).

14) Read the Scriptures! “I charge you by the Lord that this epistle be read unto all the holy brethren”(v. 27).

The above fourteen exhortations to believers describe the sanctified and blameless life required in view of **the coming of the Lord!** Practical Christian living is clearly the preparation for the Lord’s return for Paul says:

*“And the very God of peace sanctify you **wholly**; and I pray God your **whole spirit and soul and body** be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ”* (1 Thess. 5:23).

John wrote:

*“We know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. **And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as He is pure**”* (1John3:2-3).

There is no truth like the Blessed Hope to wean the Christian away from the world and fleshly living. The charge that those who love His appearing “are too heavenly minded to be any earthly good” is a fallacious charge. In practice, it is more likely that those who do not look for the Lord’s return “will be too earthly minded to be any heavenly good.”

*“If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. **Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth**”* (Col. 3:1-2).

FUTURE EVENTS IN 1 THESSALONIANS

WAITING FOR CHRIST'S RETURN

"Remembering ...your ...patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ...how ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God; And to wait for his Son from heaven...even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come"
(1 Thess. 1:3, 9-10).

"What is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming?" (1 Thess. 2:19).

"The Lord make you to increase and abound in love...to the end he may establish your hearts unblameable in holiness before God, even our Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his saints" (1 Thess. 3:12-13).

"And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Thess. 5:23).

THE RAPTURE OF THE CHURCH

"But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope."

For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him.
For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent (precede) them which are asleep.

For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first:
Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words" (1 Thess. 4:13-18).

RAPTURE BEFORE TRIBULATION

"But of the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you. For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night."

For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape. But YE, brethren, are not in darkness, that THAT DAY should overtake (fit. seize) YOU as a thief.

...But let us, who are of the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love; and for an helmet, the hope of salvation.
For God hath NOT appointed US to wrath, but to obtain salvation (deliverance of the body) by our Lord Jesus Christ, Who died for us, that, whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with him. Wherefore comfort yourselves together, and edify one another" (1 Thess. 5:1-11).

WAITING FOR THE LORD'S RETURN IMPLIES IMMINENCE. THE RAPTURE COULD NEVER BE IMMINENT, NOR A COMFORT, IF WE KNEW WE WERE TO PASS THROUGH THE DAY OF THE LORD! THAT DAY WILL OVERTAKE THE WORLD, BUT NOT THE CHURCH!

FUTURE EVENTS IN 2 THESSALONIANS

WAITING FOR CHRIST'S RETURN

"And we have confidence in the Lord touching you, that ye both do and will do the things which we command you. And the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God, and **into the patient waiting for Christ**" (2 Thess. 3:4-5).

"But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation (**deliverance of the body at the Rapture**) through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth: whereunto he called you by our gospel, **to the obtaining of the glory** of our Lord Jesus Christ...Now our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God, even our Father, which hath loved us, and hath given us everlasting consolation and good hope through grace, **comfort your hearts, and stablish you in every good word and work**" (2 Thess. 2:13, 16-17).

THE RAPTURE BEFORE ANTICHRIST

"Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, **AND by our gathering together unto him,**

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 (Tribulation) 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 (THE departure) FIRST,** and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; ...And **NOW** ye know what withholdeth (restrains) that he might be revealed **IN HIS TIME.**

For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth (restrains) will let (restrain), **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"
(2 Thess. 2:1-8).

2ND COMING AFTER TRIBULATION

"And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, **in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power;**

WHEN he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe (because our testimony among you was believed) in that day." (2 Thess. 1:7-10).

WAITING FOR THE LORD'S RETURN IMPLIES IMMINENCE. THE RAPTURE COULD NEVER BE IMMINENT, NOR A COMFORT, IF WE KNEW WE WERE TO PASS THROUGH THE DAY OF THE LORD! THE UNSAVED WILL BE LEFT FOR JUDGMENT AT THE RAPTURE.

Chapter 7 – The Second Coming of Christ - 2 Thess. 1:1-12

“It is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you; And to you who are troubled rest with us...” (2 Thess. 1:6-7).

THE Apostle’s second letter to the Thessalonian Christians was written just a few months after his first which had clarified many questions, but had left a number still unanswered in their minds. The Church was going through a period of intense persecution and because of this the believers thought that they were actually living in the Tribulation, despite Paul’s previous instruction that, *“God hath not appointed us to wrath”* (1 Thess. 5:9). Needless to say, because of the persecution the Church was confused, thinking that they had missed out on the Rapture. In response to this and other needs, Paul wrote a second letter.

This second epistle puts to rest the wrong idea that the Great Tribulation is the persecution endured by Christians in this Age.

ENCOURAGED BY THEIR FAITH.

After greeting his friends, Paul immediately gave thanks for the work of grace that was being accomplished in their lives. In his previous epistle Paul had said:

“When I could no longer forbear, I sent to know your faith, lest by some means the tempter have tempted you” (1 Thess. 3:5). Paul was reassured and acknowledged, *“... your faith groweth exceedingly”* (2 Thess. 1:3).

The tools that Satan uses to defeat Christians are many and varied, but in this epistle two are evident, **discouragement** and **deception**.

Through the centuries Christians have been subject to intense persecution as Satan has endeavoured to weaken their faith. The testimony from history however, is that the more the Church has been persecuted, the more it has grown. With Job who lost all of his livestock, servants, and family in one day, the saints have been able to say:

“Blessed be the name of the Lord.”

In all this Job sinned not, *“nor charged God foolishly”* (Job 1:21–22).

And so it was with the Thessalonians. Not only was their faith strengthened, but their love for each other was flourishing. Suffering can make us bitter and fill us with self-pity, but when tempered with grace and faith it can produce love and concern for others.

In order to further encourage them, Paul explained that their patience and endurance under such suffering had been a source of blessing to other Churches.

He wrote:

*“We ourselves **glory in you in the churches of God** for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that ye endure”* (2 Thess. 1:4).

To endure suffering is a natural survival response, but to patiently endure and triumph in such circumstances is unnatural and an evidence of the working of the Spirit of God in the life of the believer.

Unbelievers however, see the suffering of Christians as a *“manifest token of the righteous judgment of God...seeing it is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you”* (2 Thess. 1:5-6).

The words *“manifest token”* carry the thought of “an indication” of the righteous judgment of God. Every persecution of believers vindicates God and is an indication of God’s righteous judgment reserved for the persecutors.

BEHAVIOUR WORTHY OF CHRIST

Paul prayed for the Thessalonians that they would *“be counted worthy of the kingdom of God”* (2 Thess. 1:5); that they would **worthily represent** the kingdom of God by the way they endured. Twice in this first chapter we read of them being *“counted worthy”*, first of *“the kingdom of God”*(2 Thess. 1:5), and then of their *“calling”*(2 Thess. 1:11). The thought is not that they are accepted with God because they are worthy or deserving, but that their behaviour under intense pressure would be becoming of, appropriate to, or consistent with, their status as a member of the kingdom, or with their vocation as a believer.

We have similar teaching in the sermon on the mount. Jesus said:

*“Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; **That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven:** for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and **sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust”***
(Matt. 5:44-45).

No man becomes a child of God by loving his enemies. That would be salvation by works, but loving one’s enemies is consistent with the behaviour of our Heavenly Father who blesses the just and the unjust even though ungodly men are in rebellion against Him. We are to show by our attitude to our enemies, that we are the children of God and demonstrate a family trait. We behave like our Heavenly Father because we are members of His family.

In Hebrews 11, we read of the great heroes of our faith: Abraham, Isaac, Moses, and other Old Testament saints, but there is also a group not mentioned by name, and it is said of them:

*“**Others** had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and*

*imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword... being destitute, afflicted, tormented; (of whom **the world was not worthy**)” (Heb. 11:36-38).*

To suffer or lay down one’s life for Christ is an act worthy of the Son of God who laid down His life for us.

VENGEANCE IS MINE. I WILL REPAY!

Next, Paul assured them that God would take vengeance upon those who persecuted them.

God is not vindictive in punishing mankind, but He is just. We only have to consider God’s dealings with His people Israel. On many occasions God placed before the nation choices, always warning the nation of the consequences if they failed to make the right choice.

When Israel sinned God chastened them, but He also punished those who persecuted His people. The judgment that befell the nation in AD70 is described by the Lord as, “*the days of vengeance*” (Luke 21:22). Likewise, every attack on the Church will be remembered. God’s Word requires it.

Vengeance is God’s work, therefore Christians are not to seek vengeance on their persecutors.

*“Dearly beloved, **avenge not yourselves**, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, **Vengeance is mine; I will repay**, saith the Lord. Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head” (Rom. 12:19-20).*

Some nations have already tasted Divine retribution. When Pharaoh enslaved the nation of Israel and tried to drown every Jewish male child, God destroyed the first-born of every Egyptian family that failed to apply the blood of the lamb to their doorpost. He finally drowned Pharaoh with his army in the Red Sea.

When Haman plotted to annihilate the Jews in Persia, he was hanged on the gallows he had prepared for Mordecai. Haman’s sons were slain by the Jews on the very day the Jews were to be slain.

In other cases, however, God’s judgment is still pending. The story is told of two farmers, one a Christian, the other an atheist. When the season’s crops became ready for harvest, the Christian had a poor crop because his family had been very ill that season.

The atheist, on the other hand, had a bumper crop and would make a lot of money, so he taunted the Christian saying, “I thought you said it paid to believe in God and be a Christian.” “It does,” the Christian farmer replied, “But God doesn’t always pay His people in September.”

God is never in a hurry to reward with blessing or judgment. His rewards and judgment may not come today, or even tomorrow, but they are sure.

Paul tells us what that final judgment will involve. The world at large is ripening for judgment which will be poured out

“When the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire taking vengeance...” (2 Thess. 1:7-8).

It will be executed on

“them that trouble you...on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Thess. 1:8).

The punishment will be

“With everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power” (2 Thess. 1:9).

In his previous epistle, Paul dealt in some detail with the Rapture of the Church and the fact that this will introduce a period of awful Tribulation on the nations of the earth known as the *“day of the Lord”* (1 Thess. 5:1-9). Now Paul describes the conclusion of the Tribulation and indicates that the saints will be glorified while the nations are being judged.

“When he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe” (2 Thess. 1:10).

In Revelation chapter 19 the Lord Jesus is described at His second coming riding upon a white horse. He is the already-crowned victor, and He comes *“in righteousness”* to *“judge and make war”* (Rev. 19: 11).

We also read:

“Every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him, and all kindreds of the earth shall wail (beat their breasts in anguish) because of him. Even so, Amen” (Rev. 1:7).

This will be the time of God’s recompense to mankind to its persecution of saints and rejection of His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

The unbelieving nations that follow Antichrist will be *“punished”*, and pay a heavy penalty for their rejection of Christ as reflected in their treatment of His people and punishment will be neither temporary nor will it be annihilation as the Seventh Day Adventists and others teach.

Many passages of Scripture clearly teach that when Christ returns, there will not only be a separation of the believers and unbelievers for all eternity, but those punished will be consciously tormented.

Of those who follow Antichrist, we read:

“The same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God...And the smoke of their

*torment ascendeth up **for ever and ever**: and they have no rest day nor night, who worship the beast and his image, and whosoever receiveth the mark of his name”* (Rev. 14:10-11).

At the return of Christ, Antichrist and his followers will be cast into the lake of fire, but at the end of the Millennial Kingdom Satan and all his followers will be cast into the same place of everlasting fire. We read that they “*shall be tormented **day and night for ever and ever**”* (Rev. 20:10).

We get our English word “tormentor” from the same Greek word, which means “to inflict pain to obtain information”. Eternal punishment is real, and our plea is, Don’t reject Christ; take His offer of salvation before the door of opportunity closes and it is too late.

THE COMING OF THE LORD IN GLORY

The Lord will come

*“In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: **Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction** from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power”* (2 Thess. 1:8-9).

Christ’s return will bring fearful judgment and stands in stark contrast with the Rapture of the Church. When He comes to reign He will smite the nations with the sword that proceeds out of His mouth (Rev. 19:15). Then He will take the Antichrist and his false prophet and cast them into the lake of fire (Rev. 19:20).

All nations that survive the Tribulation will be gathered before the “*throne of his glory*” at Jerusalem. The saved and unsaved will be separated; “*his sheep from the goats*”. The Lord will say to those who followed Antichrist:

*“Depart from me, ye cursed, into **everlasting fire** (Gehenna, or lake of fire), prepared for the devil and his angels”* (Matt. 25:41).

Hades is where the **souls** of unsaved go after death, but *gehenna* is where the unsaved in their **resurrection bodies** are sent. Satan will be cast into the lake of fire at the end of the millennial kingdom, but Antichrist and his followers will precede him and “*the rest of the (unsaved) dead*”(Rev. 20:5). This is the resurrection spoken of in Daniel chapter 12 verse 2.

When Christ returns, Satan will be bound in the bottomless pit for 1,000 years. He will be released for a short period at the end of the 1,000 years in order to test the nations.

The judgment of the rest of the lost, before the “*great white throne*” at the end of the 1,000 years, is described in Rev. 20:11-15. Only the **resurrected unsaved** will stand before the “*great white throne*”.

REST FOR THE TROUBLED

Paul encouraged the Thessalonians

*“To you who are troubled **rest with us**”* (2 Thess. 1:7).

The word “rest” means relief or release from pressure, and can be used to describe the releasing of a stretched bowstring. The grace of God can enable believers to rest in the midst of tribulation.

From the very earliest times God’s people have been pressured by the world. Paul wrote to the Corinthian Church, that because of the troubles he and his friends had encountered in Asia Minor they were *“pressed out of measure, above strength, insomuch that we despaired even of life”* (2 Cor. 1:8).

David endured many trials and his advice was

*“**Fret not thyself** because of evil doers ...for they shall soon be cut down...**fret not** thyself in any wise to do evil”* (Ps. 37:1-8).

The word “*fret*” means “to blaze up”. We are not to react in anger or retaliate but to *“Trust in the Lord, and do good...delight thyself in the Lord...commit thy way unto the Lord...rest in the Lord”* (Ps. 37:3-7). God will deal with the wicked in His time. *“The evil doers shall be cut off”* (Ps. 37:9).

Not even the choicest of God’s servants are exempt from trials. But for the believer the promise is that there will be ultimate rest from all those trials. The hymn writer wrote:

It will be worth it all, when we see Jesus;
Life’s trials will seem so small, when we see Christ;
One glimpse of His dear face all sorrow will erase,
So bravely run the race, till we see Christ.

We look forward to the enjoyment of rest from life’s trials and to the glories of heaven, but what future is there for the lost? They face judgment and eternal punishment while the saved *“shall serve him and they shall see his face”* (Rev. 22:4). It was said of Lazarus in Paradise, *“Now he is comforted, and thou (the rich man) art tormented”* (Luke 16:25).

Finally, Paul was moved to pray for the Thessalonians, that their lives would remain consistent with their calling and destiny. Nothing is more important than having God *“fulfil all the good pleasure of his goodness”* in us and *“that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified”* (2 Thess. 1:11-12). It is not sufficient to “talk the talk” if we don’t “walk the walk”.

May God give us the grace to stand firm in whatever circumstance He sends our way, till the day we are caught up to be with Christ, and all the past will be forgotten as we rejoice in His presence for evermore. In the meanwhile,

*“Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, **Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith**; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is **set down at the right hand of the throne of God**. For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds” (Heb. 12:1-3).*

Chapter 8 – The “Departure” and the Man of Sin - 2 Thess. 2:1-12

*“Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day (the day of the Lord) shall not come except there come a falling away (lit. **THE** departure) **first**” (2 Thess. 2:3).*

IN THE previous chapter Paul gave thanks to God for the testimony of the Thessalonians and encouraged them in their time of persecution. He now corrects some misunderstandings of the prophetic program that had concerned them. The tribulation endured by Christians is not the Great Tribulation.

Paul had told them in his first epistle that the Christians were **not** appointed to the wrath of the “*day of the Lord*”, and that the Rapture would come first. We read:

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

The “*day of the Lord*” in Scripture refers to God’s judgments on the inhabitants of earth in the last days. It begins immediately after the Church is raptured and includes all of the events of the Great Tribulation. The return of the Lord Jesus in glory, and His millennial kingdom, are also a part of it.

TWO EVENTS - GATHERING AND GLORY

The subject of this chapter is twofold; the Rapture and the Glorious Appearing of the Lord.

Paul begins with the words:

*“We beseech you, brethren, by **the coming** of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by **our gathering together unto him**” (2 Thess. 2:1).*

Between these two events the awful judgments of the day of the Lord are enacted, and Paul is raising this subject because several events had taken place which led the Thessalonians to fear they were already in the Tribulation.

Paul had indicated that the day of wrath would come as a “*thief in the night*” (1 Thess. 5:2). In spite of the fact that Paul told them, “*That day shall not overtake you as a thief*” they still thought they had missed the Rapture. Two things had caused them to be shaken in their minds:

- 1) The persecution they were enduring was intense.
- 2) Letters had been received telling them that the Great Tribulation had already begun.

Their understanding was that the day of the Lord was the time of God’s wrath

poured out on the ungodly, and Paul had assured them:

“Ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief” (1 Thess 5:4).

The reports were coming to them by “*spirit, word, and letter*” (2 Thess. 2:2). Some had claimed they had received a word of prophecy from the Lord, that the day of the Lord had come. (Prophetic sign gifts were still operative). Some claimed they had heard about it from others, but the most convincing of all was a pseudo-graphic letter that they had received with Paul’s name on it. Paul brands these messages as deceit and says:

“Let no man deceive you by any means” (2 Thess. 2:3).

Erroneous teachers had echoed the same message, and caused the believers to fear. If these messages were from God, then why did Paul say that the Rapture of the Church would precede the day of the Lord? (1 Thess. 5:9).

This information alone is strong evidence that Paul had taught these believers about the pre-Tribulation Rapture of the Church, otherwise why would they be so concerned?

A FALLING AWAY OR THE DEPARTURE

Paul now proceeds to speak of two events that must occur before the day of the Lord could come.

“That day, shall not come, except there come a (the) falling away first” (2 Thess. 2:3).

The Greek noun translated “*falling away*” is *apostasia*, and the core meaning of the word is “to stand away from or depart”. It is used here and in only one other place in the New Testament, in Acts 21:21 where Paul is accused of teaching Jewish converts to **forsake** (depart from) the teachings of Moses concerning the law.

The verb form of the word is found fifteen times in the New Testament and has several usages. In 1 Tim. 6:5 Paul tells Timothy to “*withdraw*” (depart) himself from ungodly men. That is the opposite to apostasy.

In his letter to the Corinthians Paul expressed the desire that his “*thorn in the flesh*” might “**depart**” from him, that is, that God would remove it (2 Cor. 12: 8).

In Luke’s Gospel it is used of Anna the prophetess who “**departed** not from the temple but served God with fastings and prayers night and day” (Luke 2:37).

It is recorded in Acts 12:10, that when Peter was imprisoned by Herod the angel conducted him through the prison gates to the streets of the city and then “**departed from him**”.

In Luke 4:13, following the temptation of Christ, it is recorded that the Devil “**departed from him for a season**”.

Christians are told to “*depart from iniquity*”(2 Tim. 2:19). So on eleven occasions the verb is used of a physical departure from a place or from people. On only three occasions is it used of a departure from the faith (Luke 8:13, Heb. 3:12, 1 Tim. 4:1). Once it is used of departing from sin.

What exactly does Paul mean when he says that “*the falling away*” must come before the Tribulation?

Many say that the falling away prior to the commencement of the Tribulation refers to a departure from the faith, but is this correct?

How did the early translations of the Bible translate this word? The Latin Vulgate Bible, around AD400, used the word *decessio*, which means “departure”. Seven English translations, from the Wycliffe Bible of 1384 to the Geneva Bible of 1608, all translated the word as departure or departing. The King James Bible of 1611 was the first English version to translate *apostasia* as “*falling away*”.

It is also important to note that when Paul wrote this epistle, he used the definite article before the noun, therefore it should read, “**THE departure**”. This indicates that Paul was speaking of **a specific event** of which his readers were already aware. The Rapture was fully discussed in the first epistle, and the subject of this chapter is

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

APOSTASY IN THE LAST DAYS

Let us now return to the previously posed question, “What did Paul mean?”

Many understand Paul to mean a “departure from the faith” prior to the Rapture; a time of wide-spread apostasy. Theodore Beza, the successor of Calvin, in the 1500s transliterated the word *apostasia*. The word has since come to mean a departure from the faith once delivered to the saints.

But was Paul talking about a departure from the faith? As previously mentioned, in the original Greek the noun “*the apostasia*” is preceded by the definite article, which indicates that Paul is talking about **a definite event** that will precede the Tribulation and will be clearly identifiable when the time comes.

It is true however, that the Scriptures indicate that in the last days there will be an increase in lawlessness and a departure from the Word of God.

When Paul wrote to Timothy, he said that men would become totally self-centred and rebellious toward God (2 Tim. 3:1-5). He also said that

“in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils” (1 Tim. 4:1).

When Paul addressed the Ephesian elders, he warned that “*grievous wolves*” would enter in among them, “*not sparing the flock*”. These would be men “*speaking perverse things to draw away disciples after them*” (Acts 20:29-30).

So apostasy is not just a feature of the last days, for it was present in the Christian Church in the days of the Apostles and has continued for the last 2,000 years.

It is true that after the Rapture of the Church there will be a worldwide ecumenical religious movement that will seek to bring all religions under its control. This system will also have a huge influence on the political development of Antichrist’s kingdom (Rev. 17:7). It is already emerging but will not come into being until after the Rapture, whereas Paul told the Thessalonians that the Tribulation will not come until after “the departure” takes place, so it cannot be referring to this system.

Paul reinforces the view that it is the Rapture, and not a departure from the faith, when he says:

“For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth will let (now restrains will restrain), until he be taken out of the way. And then shall that Wicked (one) be revealed” (2 Thess. 2:7-8).

“Taken out of the way”, is **the departure**.

WHO HINDERS THE APPEARANCE OF THE MAN OF SIN?

The one who restrains or hinders Satan’s plan to rule the world today is God the Holy Spirit indwelling His true Church. It is His influence in the Church that prevents the whole world becoming absolutely corrupt and evil in the sight of God. The Church is the salt of the earth.

Christians should never underestimate the value of a life lived to the glory of God. It has more weight in this world than can be imagined.

Here Paul says that the revelation of Antichrist is held back until the presence of the Holy Spirit is removed, and that event takes place when the Church is raptured. These verses show that there is the same progression of thought in verses 3, 7 and 8.

From earliest times there have been two views of who it is that hinders the appearance of Antichrist. Chrysostom (AD347-407), in his *Homily 4* on 2 Thess. 2:6-9, mentions them both. He writes:

“What then is it that withholdeth, that is, hindereth him from being revealed? Some indeed say, the grace of the Spirit, but others the Roman empire, to whom I most of all accede. Wherefore? Because if he meant to say the Spirit, he would not have spoken obscurely, but plainly, that even now the grace of the Spirit, that is the gifts, withhold him. And otherwise he ought

now to have come, if he was about to come when the gifts ceased; for they have long since ceased.”

Because the sign gifts of the Holy Spirit had ceased long before the day of Chrysostom, and the Roman Empire was crumbling under the attacks of Germanic tribes, he concluded that the restrainer must therefore be the Roman Empire and that once it collapsed, which it did in the West in AD476, the man of sin would appear. However, Antichrist did not appear.

He wrongly assumed that the sign gifts of the Holy Spirit were restraining or hindering the appearance of Antichrist. The cessation of the sign gifts however did not indicate that the Holy Spirit had ceased to work as the indwelling Christ within the Church. The sign gifts were a temporary manifestation of the presence of the Holy Spirit in the Body of Christ and Paul had written of their temporary nature when he penned his first letter to the Corinthians:

*“Charity never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, **they shall fail**; whether there be tongues, **they shall cease**; whether there be knowledge, **it shall vanish away**. For we know in part, and we prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part **shall be done away**”* (1 Cor. 13:8-10).

Many Bible commentators have followed Chrysostom’s line of teaching that the Hinderer was the Roman Empire, and because AD476 did not bring Antichrist to power, they see the Papacy, which began (AD600) with Gregory the Great, as the “*man of sin*”. The Reformers and others believed the Pope was the Antichrist.

Antichrist, however, is **a man** and not a system. The Hinderer is **a person**; the Holy Spirit. The Papacy is seen in Revelation 17 & 18 as the harlot woman, and not the Antichrist. The Antichrist is the beast which is ridden by the harlot woman.

The Holy Spirit did not depart when the sign gifts ceased with the passing of the Apostles, and He still indwells the true Church. While ever the Church is present in this world the “*man of sin*” cannot be revealed, but once the Holy Spirit indwelling the Church is removed, then the man of sin will appear.

Paul reinforces this point:

*“But God hath from the beginning **chosen you to salvation** (deliverance) through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth: Whereunto he called you by our gospel, **to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ**”* (2 Thess. 2:13-14).

Election is always to glorification and not to faith. The process is through conviction by the Spirit (sanctification), belief of the Truth of the Gospel which Paul preached. Here the word **salvation** is used in the same sense as in (1 Thess. 5:9).

*“God hath not appointed us unto wrath (Tribulation) but **to obtain salvation**”*

(deliverance) *through our Lord Jesus Christ.*”

Our salvation will be complete with the redemption of the body which is the Rapture. So the day of the Lord cannot commence until the Holy Spirit indwelling the Church is taken away.

SUMMARY

The following is a brief summary of Paul’s teaching in this passage. He says - don’t be shaken in mind or troubled because you have heard from those who are uttering false prophecies, or others who have reported what they have been told, or by any letter claiming to have been sent from me, that the Tribulation has commenced. Do not be deceived by these messages, for the departure of the Church must take place first.

Thomas Ice, of Dallas Theological Seminary, wrote this conclusion:

“If it is true that “apostasia” most likely has the meaning of physical departure, it is a clear support for pre-tribulationism and it means that a prophetic sequence is laid out by Paul early in his apostolic ministry and that he taught that the rapture will occur first, before the Day of the Lord commences. It is not until after the beginning of the Day of the Lord that the Antichrist is released, resulting in the events described by him in chapter 2 of 2 Thessalonians. This is the only interpretation that provides hope for a discomfited people. Maranatha!”

Our prayer is that the reader will prayerfully examine the facts presented in this chapter and come to a clear understanding of what Paul is teaching.

Chapter 9 - Antichrist Identified - 2 Thess. 2:3-8

“That day (The day of the Lord) shall not come, except there come a falling away (THE departure) first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God” (2 Thess. 2:3-4).

PAUL had taught that there are two unmistakable signs that the judgment of the world had commenced. The first was the Rapture of the Church and the second was the revelation of the the Antichrist. This is the name we use to identify the last world dictator, called by Paul, *“that man of sin”*.

Many people in history have been identified as the Antichrist because they have been against God. But “anti” also means “instead of”. This man will not only be anti-God, but he will demand universal worshiped instead of God.

WHO IS ANTICHRIST?

God’s Word is very clear as to the origin of the Antichrist; he arises as head of a revived Roman Empire. In chapter 7 of the Book of Daniel, when introduced to the fourth beast representing the Roman Empire, Daniel was told that the ten horns on its head represented ten kings that will rule this kingdom and that *“another shall rise after them”*. He would

“speak great words against the most High, and shall wear out the saints (the Jewish people) of the most High...and they (the Jewish people) shall be given into his hand until a time and times and the dividing of time” (Dan. 7:25).

Antichrist’s first appearance in the Book of Revelation is as the first seal judgment is opened at the beginning of the Tribulation (Rev. 6:2). Here he is seen as a rider on a white horse going forth *“conquering, and to conquer”*. The rider has a bow but no arrow, indicating that his rise to power will be by peaceful means. A crown is *“given to him”* meaning that men will submit to him.

He will be a leader amongst men, who will emerge as a political genius to stabilise the world in the midst of a vacuum caused by the Rapture of the Church.

One of Antichrist’s first acts will be the confirmation of a covenant with Israel (Dan. 9:27). This treaty with Israel will not only offer protection for the nation, but will allow a Jewish Temple to be built on the Temple Mount at Jerusalem.

DANIEL 11:36-45

Antichrist's power for the first three-and-a-half years will be confined mainly to the West as he leads a European confederation of ten kings. His first conflict will come when he invades the Middle East to deal with a threatened invasion by Egypt upon Israel (Dan. 11:40). This will give Antichrist the excuse to move a peace-keeping military force into *"the glorious land"* (Israel) and *"many countries"* in the region. Countries immediately to the east of the Jordan River will be the exception. The Biblical land of Edom, Moab and Ammon, will not be taken. Perhaps Jordan will be confederate with him.

Following his conflict with Egypt (Isa. 19) he will amass wealth and resources to extend his power.

"He shall have power over the treasures of gold and silver, and over all the precious things of Egypt" (Dan. 11:43).

Perhaps all trade will be done in the Euros thus giving him power over every economy on earth.

At this point in time news of a great army gathering to the **north and east of Israel** (Russia, Turkey, and Iran) will cause him concern, but before these invading armies lock horns with him God brings the invaders to their knees, destroying them on *"the mountains of Israel"* (Ezek. 39:4). The remnant retreat to the north east, into the wastelands of Siberia (Joel 2:20).

Chapter 2 of the Book of Joel and Ezekiel 38 and 39, give many details of this invasion and the decimation of these armies. It is interesting that little is said of Antichrist's reaction to this event, but as a result of the vacuum that this will cause in the Middle East he will move his power base from Europe to the Middle East.

"And he shall plant the tabernacles of his palace between the seas" (Mediterranean and Dead Seas making Jerusalem his capital) *"in the glorious holy mountain"* (Dan. 11:45).

This strategic manoeuvre will prepare the way for the next phase of his global conquest and claim of deity. Thus far he has co-operated with apostate Christendom, "Mystery Babylon", but his relationship is fractured and finally he turns upon her and burns her with fire as the seventh vial of God's wrath is poured out (Rev. 16:17-19).

The last three-and-one-half years will see *"the man of sin"* in full control, seated in the Temple at Jerusalem and worshipped as God.

“And the ten horns... shall hate the whore (the apostate religious system), and shall make her desolate... For God hath put in their hearts to fulfil his will, and to agree, and give their kingdom unto the beast (Antichrist)” (Rev. 17:16-17).

Paul describes the man of sin to the Thessalonians as one

“Who opposeth, and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped” (2 Thess. 2:4).

Antichrist will subjugate all people to himself by stamping out all worship except of himself. Daniel describes him as the king who

“Shall do according to his will”, and who will “exalt himself, and magnify himself above every god, and shall speak marvellous things against the God of gods” (Dan. 11:36).

ANTIOCHUS EPIPHANES A TYPE OF ANTICHRIST

In order to understand the context of Daniel 11:36-45 we should read the preceding verses, which give a prophecy of another man who was to come and do much that Antichrist would do. His name was Antiochus Epiphanes IV, and he was the king of the northern Seleucid Empire. He ruled from 175 BC to 163 BC at the end of the Grecian era of history. Daniel foretells his rise to power (Dan. 11:21-35), and the two Books of Maccabees record the fulfilment.

The Hasmonean dynasty of high priests was established at this time by the Maccabees after the Jewish revolt in 167BC which finally overthrew the Seleucid king in December 165BC.

Antiochus came to power by seizing the throne through intrigue (v. 21), at the same time deposing the High Priest in Israel, Onias III. Supported by a few followers and flushed with a number of military victories, his popularity was further enhanced by redistributing the spoils of war amongst the poor (vs. 23-24).

In 170BC, after consolidating his kingdom, he moved against the Ptolemaic Empire in Egypt. There he met a large Egyptian army at Pelusium, near the Nile Delta, where a decisive victory was won. They sat down together and agreed to a peace plan that neither party had any intention of keeping (vs. 25-27).

Following his victory he returned home, and although he carried great wealth with him he was bitterly disappointed. As he passed through the land of Israel he stopped at Jerusalem and vented his frustrations on the Jewish people by desecrating the Temple (v. 31).

Two years later, with a greater force, he again moved against Egypt. This time he

not only encountered the Egyptian army but an emissary of the Romans who had arrived from Cyprus carrying a letter from the Roman Senate forbidding him to engage in war with Egypt.

In order to stall for time Antiochus requested that he be given time to consider the letter, so the emissary drew a circle in the sand around him and told him to take all the time he liked, but not to step out of the circle until he had decided (vs. 29-30). This ultimatum left him no alternative but to return home or incur the wrath of the rising power of Rome.

Frustrated and humiliated, Antiochus visited Jerusalem with great fury. His aim was to exterminate Judaism. He again desecrated the Temple, but this time he also forbade the daily sacrifice on pain of death. Pretending to send a peace force of 22,000 soldiers to the city, he instead attacked the Jews on the Sabbath day, plundered the city, and killed many. Large numbers of women and children were made slaves. Jews were forbidden to circumcise their children, no Jewish worship was allowed, and all copies of the law were to be burned. (vs. 30-32)

His final act of desecration in 167 BC was to erect an altar to the god Zeus in the Temple and have a pig offered on the altar. Thereafter Jews were compelled to offer a pig on the 25th of each month to celebrate his birthday. Those Jews who acceded to his wishes and worshiped Zeus were promised great rewards, and although many accepted his offer, a remnant remained faithful and refused to engage in these practices.

Antiochus died in 163BC in Persia as his nickname “Epimanes” described him, a mad man. Why does the word of God spend so much time detailing the exploits of a man who persecuted the nation of Israel and has since passed into history? It is because this man epitomises the final world ruler that will arise in the last days.

THE MAN OF SIN

Antiochus stands as a “type” or shadow of the “*man of sin*”. The substance will be far more evil, and have greater power than the shadow. His power to deceive the nations will be unsurpassed, and he receives his power and authority from Satan, for we read:

“The dragon (Satan) gave him his power, and his seat (throne), and great authority”
(Rev. 13:2).

The Dragon and the “*man of sin*” work together. Paul calls him “*the son of perdition*”. The Greek word for “*perdition*” is *apoleias* and we read in Rev. 9:11 that the king over the demons that are released from the bottomless pit has the name Apollyon

(Greek, *apolluon*). The words mean “destruction”. and “destroyer” respectively.

It is obvious that the “*man of sin*” is completely under Satan’s control.

In many ways, Antichrist will seek to replicate Christ. There is a Divine Trinity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, and there is a trinity of evil - the Dragon, the Antichrist, and the False Prophet.

Jesus told the Jews, “*Ye are of your FATHER the devil*” (John 8:44). Antichrist is the “*beast that...was, and is not; and shall ascend out of the bottomless pit, and go into perdition*” (Rev. 17:8). Miraculously his human body suffers a “*deadly wound*” “*by a sword and did live*” (Rev. 13:3,12,14). The False Prophet causes all to worship the Antichrist by miracles, signs and wonders, and mighty works (Rev. 13:12-15).

Paul says that he, as God

“sitteth in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God” (2 Thess. 2:4).

The forces of deception released by Antichrist will be great. Paul says he will come with “*all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish*” (2 Thess. 2:10).

Jesus said of the first half of the Tribulation:

“Many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many” (Matt. 24:11).

However, concerning the second half of the Tribulation, He said:

*“Then if any man shall say unto you, **Lo, here is Christ**, or there; believe it not. For there shall arise **false Christs, and false prophets**, and shall shew **great signs and wonders**; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect”*
(Matt. 24:23-26).

The description of the man of sin and details of his activities bear a distinct resemblance to the “miracle workers” who, in our day, are propagating their wares in the name of religion. From every part of the world come reports of signs and wonders or “miracles”.

Visions of Mary are accompanied by messages of coming doom, and thousands flock to sacred sites for healing. Hindus feed images of an elephant with spoons of milk and small images are said to consume gallons!

Buddha’s images show a strange glow, tears of blood flow from Mary’s images, and Charismatic preachers talk in demonic gibberish, “slay in the spirit”, and claim to heal the sick and infirmed.

The world is clearly being conditioned for the greatest miracle-worker of all time, “*the man of sin*”.

The False Prophet, who will appear with Antichrist, will also have supernatural powers and cause

*“the earth and them which dwell therein to worship the first beast, **whose deadly wound was healed**. And he doeth great wonders, so that he maketh fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men, and deceiveth them that dwell on the earth by the means of those miracles... And he had power to give life unto the image of the beast, that **the image of the beast should both speak**, and cause that as many as would not worship the image of the beast should be killed”* (Rev. 13:12-15).

THE TRIBULATION IS “THE TIME OF JACOB’S TROUBLE”

The Lord Jesus warned **the Jews** about the last days when they would see *“the abomination (idol) of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place (in the Temple)”* (Matt. 24:15).

Daniel stated that this would happen at the half-way point of the 7-year Tribulation. He wrote that the Roman prince (Antichrist) would *“confirm the covenant with many for **one week** (seven): **and in the midst of the week** (seven) he shall cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease, and for the overspreading of abominations (idols) he shall make it desolate”* (Dan. 9:27).

A Jewish Temple must be constructed on the Temple Mount and Jewish sacrifices recommence. Paul wrote:

*“He as God sitteth **in the temple of God**, shewing himself that he is God”*
(2 Thess. 2:4).

In the first half of the Tribulation the entire Jewish nation will turn to Jesus Christ as Messiah and Lord. Ezekiel states:

*“So the house of Israel shall know that I am the **LORD** their God **from that day and forward**... **Neither will I hide my face any more from them**: for I have poured out my spirit upon the house of Israel, saith the Lord **GOD**”*
(Ezek. 39:22-29).

Paul places this conversion of Israel **after the Church is complete**.

*“Blindness in part is happened to Israel, **UNTIL the fulness of the Gentiles be come in**. **And so all Israel shall be saved**: as it is written, **There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer**, and shall turn away ungodliness **from Jacob**: For this is my covenant unto **them**, when I shall take away their sins”* (Rom. 11:25-27).

When the last soul is added to the Church, the Bride of Christ, it will be removed at the Rapture and the last 7 years of Israel’s history will run its course.

Half-way through the Tribulation, Israel will flee into **the mountains of Judah** for safety, as unprecedented persecution threatens to wipe out the Jewish nation.

“But for the elect’s sake those days shall be shortened” (Matt. 24:22).

John wrote:

“And to the woman (Israel) were given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness, into her place, where she is nourished for a time, and times, and half a time, (1,260 days, v. 6) from the face of the serpent” (Rev. 12:14).

Everything about the Great Tribulation is Jewish. We will search in vain for any reference to the Church on earth during the Tribulation.

There will be 144,000 Jewish *“servants of our God”* sealed to preach the Gospel of the Kingdom during the first half of the Tribulation (Rev. 7:1-8; Matt. 24:14).

Two Jewish prophets will witness at Jerusalem for 1,260 days until they *“have finished their testimony”* (Rev. 11:7).

Not only will the Jewish nation suffer when the man of sin reigns, but the whole world will be forced to bow and worship him on pain of death. The ability to earn a living or purchase food will be limited to those who wear the “mark of the beast” (Rev. 13:17). It is no wonder that Paul calls the man of sin, *“that Wicked (one)”* (2 Thess. 2:8).

All of these things had been taught to the Thessalonians for he wrote:

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

In this Epistle Paul was reassuring them that they were not presently in the Tribulation, and that before the Tribulation began the Church must depart and the “man of sin” appear. His words come as a warning to the unsaved. If you are unsaved at the Rapture you will enter the dark days of Antichrist’s kingdom.

Chapter 10 – Antichrist's Deception -

2 Thess. 2:1-12

“And then shall that Wicked be revealed... Even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders” (2 Thess. 2:8-9).

THUS far we have seen the awfulness of Antichrist's kingdom, and the fact that

*“power was given him over all kindreds, and tongues, and nations. And **all that dwell upon the earth shall worship him**”* (Rev. 13:7-8).

We might ask, How could this man achieve such authority? It will be accomplished in three ways.

First, he will use **force**. *“As many as would not worship the image of the beast should be killed”* (Rev. 13:15).

Secondly, he will use **coersion**. *“He causeth all...to receive a mark...that no man might buy or sell, save he that had the mark”* (Rev. 13:16-17).

Thirdly, he will use **deception**. *“With all... lying wonders”*(2 Thess. 2:9). This last method will cause the majority of the world to follow Satan's man.

HOW WILL ANTICHRIST DECEIVE?

Paul says that Antichrist's coming is *“after the working of Satan”* (2 Thess. 2:9). Satan is the great deceiver. Christ said,

“There is no truth in him... for he is a liar, and the father of it (John 8:44).

Paul wrote of Antichrist:

*“Even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, and with **all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish**”*(2 Thess. 2:9-10).

The Lord Jesus performed signs and wonders to convince the Jews that He was of the Truth. Antichrist will use demonic powers to lead people away from the Truth.

We should not underestimate the supernatural power available to Antichrist and his false prophet. **Genuine miracles** will be performed so that *“all the world wondered after the beast”* (Rev. 13:3).

Ever since Adam and Eve lies have been propagated concerning the truth of God and His Word, and many have followed blindly. Modern-day cults make outlandish claims and intelligent people implicitly follow their teachings.

Twelve million Mormons belong to an organisation which teaches that the

Gospel is not the good news of Christ's death and resurrection, but that the laws and ordinances of the Mormon Church bring salvation. Mormons teach that God was once a man, and has a body of flesh and blood, and that He dwells on the planet Kolob. They also teach that there is no salvation outside the Mormon Church, and that man can become a god.

World population has never been so great, nor the number of false religions so many, and countless millions are blindly following all manner of lies on their way to a Christless eternity.

It is little wonder that multitudes will be deceived when the false prophet *"maketh fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men"*, and has *"power to give life unto the image of the beast (antichrist), that the image of the beast should both speak, and cause that as many as would not worship the image of the beast should be killed"* (Rev. 13:13-15).

We should remember, however, that God will still be at work during the Great Tribulation. His power is infinite, and He never leaves Himself without a witness. The 144,000 Jewish men, sealed by God, will proclaim the Gospel of the Kingdom during the first half of the 7-year Tribulation. On a *pro rata* basis, that would mean 460 Spirit-filled preachers in Australia and 6,200 in America! (about one per 45,000).

The Gospel of the Kingdom is that Christ is about to come and establish His kingdom. It is the same message as was preached by John the Baptist, the Lord Jesus and the disciples; *"Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand"* (Matt. 4:17). Acceptance with God will be, as always, by virtue of Christ's finished work on the cross.

Peter wrote that God is

"not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance"
(2 Pet. 3:9).

The Gospel preached on the day of Pentecost was:

"whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Acts 2:21).

Satan's delusion, no matter how powerful, is no excuse for rejecting the Truth. Every man or woman has a free will and must ultimately decide his or her eternal destiny.

Sadly, many will reject the Gospel of the Kingdom preached to them and choose to believe the lie of the *"man of sin"*. Paul wrote:

*"Because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved... **God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie**"* (2 Thess. 2:11).

Many Gentiles will be saved during the Tribulation, but many will be deceived

by the Antichrist. John wrote:

*"I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne... And one of the elders answered, saying unto me, What are these which are arrayed in white robes? and whence came they? And I said unto him, Sir, thou knowest. And he said to me, These are **they which came out of (the) great tribulation**, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb" (Rev. 7:9-14).*

Some believe that those who have heard the Gospel in this age will be saved after the Rapture when they suddenly realise their mistake and come to faith in Christ.

Actually, this passage teaches exactly the opposite. Those who reject the Gospel message in this age of the Church will find it easier to believe the lie.

When Moses went to Pharaoh and asked him to let the children of Israel go, Pharaoh refused. So God sent plagues upon the nation to show His power. Pharaoh hardened his heart and refused the request, then seven times **it is recorded that God hardened his heart.**

Was God to blame for Pharaoh's spiritual condition? Certainly not. Pharaoh heard God's Word, saw God's wonders, yet refused to bow to God's will.

When a person continually resists the voice of God, he hardens his own heart and finally becomes deluded, believing a lie.

WILL MEN BE RESPONSIBLE?

It might be argued that Antichrist's deception will be so great that men could be excused for following him, but these are not unwilling unbelievers. They find pleasure in their ungodly lifestyle. They

*"believed not the truth, but **had pleasure in unrighteousness**" (2 Thess. 2:12).*

Men do not change, and their reasons for rejecting the Truth in every age are the same.

*"This is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and **men loved darkness rather than light**, because their deeds were evil" (John 3:19).*

In Romans chapters 1 to 3 Paul shows why man needs God's righteousness. He gives a list of sins that were rampant in his day and notes that although people know that

*"they which commit such things are worthy of death not only do the same, but **have pleasure in them that do them**" (Rom. 1:32).*

Enjoyment of sin and the pleasure it brings, hardens the heart to God's call, and Paul's warning to those who reject the Gospel is:

"God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie" (2 Thess. 2:11).

Persistent rejection of Christ makes it easier to believe the Devil's lie. In Noah's day, God said:

*"My spirit shall **not always strive** with man" (Gen. 6:3).*

Men cannot presume that God will plead for ever. A deadline was set before the flood, and after one hundred and twenty years of opportunity the deluge came. The door of mercy was closed by God.

Jesus said:

*"And as it was in the days of Noah, so shall it be also in the days of the Son of man. They did eat, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, **until the day that Noah entered into the ark, and the flood came, and destroyed them all**" (Luke17:26-27).*

For those who, in this age of grace, wilfully resist God's Spirit, there can be no second chance after the Rapture. Actually, they will not want a second chance, because their hardened hearts will be so deceived as to welcome the Antichrist.

LIVING UNTIL THE RAPTURE

Having assured the Thessalonians that they were not in the Day of the Lord, and that the departure of the Church must precede the revelation of the "*man of sin*", Paul now encourages them to live for Christ in view of that coming day. He gives thanks and states that "*God hath ...chosen you to salvation*" (2 Thess. 2:13).

We have already seen that Paul is not referring to salvation from the guilt of sin, but deliverance from the presence of sin at the Rapture. The context is about the Rapture and the Great Tribulation. Their promised deliverance was a good reason to give thanks.

This interpretation is confirmed by the next verse, which states:

*"**Whereunto** he called you by our gospel, to the **obtaining of the glory** of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Thess. 2:14).*

The word "*whereunto*" refers back to the word "*salvation*" in the previous verse, and indicates that the salvation in view is **glorification** and not **justification**. The process by which we are chosen to share in "*the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ*" is "*through sanctification of the Spirit and **belief of the truth***" (2 Thess. 2:13).

Sanctification is the work of **conviction** which begins before we are saved. Peter declared that we are

*"elect according to the **foreknowledge** of God the Father, **through sanctification of the Spirit**, unto obedience (repentance) and the sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ" (1 Peter1:2).*

All three persons of the Godhead are wonderfully involved in our salvation. The Father knows beforehand who will believe and has provided for all to be saved,

His Holy Spirit strives with us to create a sense of need and point us to Christ, and the blood of Christ washes away our every sin the moment we believe. **God has chosen all those who thus believe to share the glory of Christ at the Rapture!**

THEREFORE... STAND FAST!

“*Therefore*”, because of the blessed hope, the believers are to “*stand fast*” while they wait for the Lord to come. Our behaviour in the interim period now comes into view. **Practical holiness is again linked to the hope of the Lord’s return.**

The command to “*stand fast*” is predicated on the assurance that we are ordained (appointed) to participate in the Rapture before the Tribulation. It is in fact the ground of Paul’s appeal to “*stand fast*”.

Paul mentions four ways we are to “*stand fast*” until we are raptured into His presence. All four of them concern the Word of God.

- 1) The first way to stand fast is to ***believe the truth***. It is the very foundation stone on which our new life is built. We are saved through “*belief of the truth*”. Paul says this was “*from the beginning*” (2 Thess. 2:13). It is an evidence of salvation that we implicitly believe the Bible. We are “*born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever*” (1 Peter 1:23).

We live in an age when people would prefer to doubt the Word of God because its message condemns their worldly lifestyle. If we are to stand fast, we need a strong “*belief of the truth*”. We must judge every issue by the plumbline of God’s Word.

Modern versions have brought confusion and uncertainty about the words of Scripture, but “*The words of the LORD are pure words: as silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times*” (Ps. 12:6).

When Paul wrote to Timothy, he told him:

“All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works” (2 Tim. 3:16-17).

The reason we have been given the Word of God is first to bring us to salvation, and then to spiritual maturity in Christ.

- 2) The second way to “*stand fast*” is to ***guard the Truth***.

“Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions (all the teachings Paul had shared with them) which ye have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle” (2 Thess. 2:15).

The Greek word translated “*hold*” is *krat-eh’-o*. It means “to use strength, i.e. seize or retain.” It could be translated “hold fast”.

It is important that we take a **strong stand for the Word of God**. It is not wrong to insist upon the integrity of God's Word. We may be branded as intolerant and inflexible, or even legalistic, but God wants us to be intolerant to sin in our lives, or we won't stand fast in an evil world.

As Christians, we are constantly bombarded with psychology and anti-Christian teaching. Christian counselling is largely humanistic and un-Biblical. Self-worth and self-confidence have become the goal, whereas Paul wrote: "*I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me*" (Gal. 2:20). The wisdom of man has replaced the Word of God.

There is a constant danger of being swept downstream by the current of an ungodly culture, and it may appear easier to go with the current. The Hebrew Christians were warned to

"give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip (drift away)" (Heb. 2:1).

When you resist, you increase your strength. Stand firm, don't give way, **resist the drift** and you will gain strength to fight the next spiritual battle.

The third way we are to stand fast is to **proclaim and practice the Truth**. Paul's prayer was that the Thessalonians might be established "*in every good word and work*" (2 Thess. 2:17).

It is no good defending the Truth if we do not demonstrate the Truth by the way we live. When Lazarus was raised from the dead he did not have to give a lecture proving Jesus had the power to raise the dead, people could see that he was alive.

Finally, if we are to stand fast until Christ returns we must **pray for the spread of God's Word**. Paul wrote:

"Brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may have free course, and be glorified" (2 Thess 3:1).

If our Christian service does not have as its goal the propagation of the Word of God then we have to question the value of our service.

We must also remember that we do not stand fast alone. We are labourers together in God's harvest field and should pray that the Word of God will abound through others who are called to the mission field and teaching ministries. Our prayer support is vital.

The truth of the Lord's return is the greatest reason why we should stand fast. "***Stand fast!***"

Chapter 11 – Waiting Patiently -

2 Thess. 3:1-18

PAUL concluded his second letter to the Thessalonians with a request for prayer. He had ended his first epistle with the words, “Brethren, pray for us” (1 Thess. 5:25), but now he is more specific.

“Finally, brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may have free course (run), and be glorified, even as it is with you” (2 Thess. 3:1).

The epistle was written from the wealthy and wicked city of Corinth, which was well known for its idolatrous and immoral pagan worship. The temple of the goddess Aphrodite (called Venus by the Romans), with one thousand temple prostitutes known as “Corinthian Girls”, had earned a reputation for the cosmopolitan city which was located on the cross-roads between Asia and Europe. A proverb warned, “Not for every man is the voyage to Corinth.”

At Corinth, the Jews had rejected Paul’s message (Acts 18:6), and when Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue believed, they brought Paul before the Roman deputy Gallio and charged him with insurrection. Gallio had responded by driving the Jews from the judgment seat. Thus Paul asks that he “*be delivered from unreasonable (absurd) and wicked men*” (2 Thess. 3:2).

These perverse and evil men forcefully rejected the truth just as Christ had warned the disciples at the last supper: “*If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you*” (John 15:18). Paul’s concern was that “*the word of the Lord may have free course (run), and be glorified*”, as it had been among the Thessalonians.

He was confident for, he said, “*The Lord is faithful*” to establish, keep from evil, and direct their hearts “*into the patient waiting for Christ*” (2 Thess. 3:5).

Having asked for prayer Paul returned to the subject that has dominated these epistles; the subject of the Lord’s return.

PAUL’S COMMANDMENTS

The patient waiting for Christ must not be used as an excuse for idleness and there was such a problem among the Thessalonians.

Paul told the busybodies to “*do your own business, and to work with your own hands*” (1 Thess. 4:11) He reminded them that when he was with them he had commanded them so to do and the elders were told “*to warn them that are unruly*” (1 Thess. 5:14).

The word “*unruly*” is a military term meaning “to keep rank”. A soldier out of rank, out of step, will spoil a perfect parade, and failure to keep rank on the

battlefield could be disastrous.

The word also suggests “insubordination” and so Paul had told them to esteem very highly them “*which labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you*” (1 Thess. 5:12-13).

It is possible that those who were not working with their own hands may have misinterpreted Paul’s teaching about the return of Christ and in the second epistle these are described as “*disorderly*” (2 Thess. 3:6,7,11), but it is the same Greek word as is translated “*unruly*” in 1 Thess. 5:14. They were “insubordinate” and not “keeping rank” because they were not gainfully employed.

Misinterpretation of prophetic Scriptures and misapplication of the Word of God can cause endless disappointment and trouble. To show the seriousness of the problem, Paul sent them a message.

“We command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly” (2 Thess. 3:6 also 3:12).

Those who laboured in the Word were to be supported, but those who were leaving their jobs and expecting charity from the Church were choosing a life of idleness while others were working to support them. This is not what Paul meant by, “*the patient waiting for Christ*”.

A good work ethic was an established “*tradition*” (v. 6) as the fruit of the Spirit in believers made them industrious, and gave a conscience about the sin of laziness. The hope of the Lord’s return activated the believers to greater activity.

However, some had become idle gossipers. Their excuse for not working was, We don’t have to, because the Lord is coming soon.

The foolishness of some is recorded in history as they have set dates for the return of the Lord. They have sold their possessions and gone to a location, such as a mountain, to await an event that never happened.

Paul commands such to work and uses a military term handed down from a superior officer, which must be obeyed. Labour was commanded by God in Eden before Adam sinned:

“The Lord God took the man, and put him into the Garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it” (Gen. 2:15).

There is no such thing as “idle bliss”. Work was never the result of sin, and Adam was not idle in the Garden of Eden. Man needs work for personal fulfilment. Jesus said:

“My Father worketh hitherto, and I work” (John 5:17).

It should be noted that Paul was dealing with a cultural difference between Jews

and Greeks. The Jews honoured honest labour and required all Rabbis to have a trade. The Greeks, however, despised manual labour and left it to their slaves to perform. The Greek culture had led some believers into an unchristian way of life.

Social Security systems in Western countries are a great blessing but they can also encourage idleness. It is hard to understand how any able-bodied Christian can go to Bible College or engage in full-time Christian work while living on social security unless they are of pensionable age.

It should be noted that Paul was not referring to those who were physically incapable of work, for he said:

“comfort the feeble minded, support the weak, be patient toward all men” (1 Thess. 5:14).

Paul had already set the example when he ministered among them.

“Neither did we eat any man’s bread for nought, but wrought with labour and travail night and day” (2 Thess. 3:8).

It is not inconsistent for a “full-time” Christian worker to take a job, where that becomes necessary in order to fulfil the ministry.

CHURCH DISCIPLINE

Those who failed to keep the tradition of work were to be made aware of their sin, and the Church was to *“have no **company** with them”*. They were **not** to be treated as enemies, but shamed for their behaviour. In fact, they were to be encouraged to work, perhaps by providing employment opportunities. The word translated *“company”* means to “mix together”. It does not imply complete separation.

Biblical Church discipline for idleness does not involve utter rejection and isolation, for Paul says to *“admonish him as a brother”*. Admonition cannot be administered if no contact is maintained. The purpose of discipline, is to assist recovery from failure. It would be wrong to condemn a brother for not working, if we were able to employ him!

FINAL SALUTATION

Paul concludes his epistle with a beautiful salutation. He desires that they *“always and by all means”* experience the peace of God and the presence of God. That means, at “all times and in every circumstance” they are not perturbed or distressed as they consciously enjoy the presence of God in their daily walk.

Enoch *“walked with God”*. He knew the daily presence of God, and there came a time when *“he was not; for God took him”*. We know that he was looking for the Lord to come, for he wrote:

“Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousands of his saints” (Jude1:14).

Paul said to the Thessalonians:

“The Lord be with you all” (2 Thess. 3:16).

No emotion can surpass the peace and joy of the Lord’s presence, and our ultimate joy will be when we shall be *“forever with the Lord”* (1 Thess. 4:17).

The crowning words of the Book of Ezekiel are, *“The LORD is there”* (Ezek. 48:35), and Joel concludes his prophecy on the same note; *“the LORD dwelleth in Zion”* (Joel 3:21).

Paul walked with Christ, but that was but a foretaste of something far more wonderful:

*“To depart, and to be **with Christ**; which is far better”* (Phil. 1:23).

As we walk life’s journey in a wicked world, it becomes most important that we know the abiding presence of Christ. Someone called it, “practicing the presence of Christ”. Jesus said:

*“As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, **except ye abide in me**”* (John 15:4).

PAUL’S SIGNATURE

Finally, Paul puts his signature on the epistle:

*“The salutation of Paul with mine **own hand**, which is the token in every epistle: so I write”* (2 Thess. 3:17).

Christians should never send anonymous letters. Though Paul’s eyesight was so poor that he was compelled to dictate his epistles to a scribe, he never failed to sign them with his **own hand**. To the Galatians, he wrote:

*“Ye see how **large a letter** I have written unto you with **mine own hand**”* (Gal. 6:11).

The Epistle to the Galatians is not particularly lengthy; Paul was referring to the **large letters** in his handwriting, resulting from poor eyesight. He concluded, as in all his epistles, with the words, *“The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen”* (2 Thess. 3:18).

THE IMMINENCE OF THE LORD’S RETURN.

In coming to the end of the studies in these epistles, two aspects of what Paul taught concerning the prophetic program stand out.

The Thessalonian Christians were expecting the Lord to return. The teaching of the Word of God is that the Rapture of the Church is imminent; by this we mean that so far as we know, no predicted event will necessarily precede the coming of Christ **for His Church**. It was a message clearly taught by the Lord Jesus Christ Himself.

Paul had also taught the imminence of the Lord's return to the Thessalonians, for he wrote of those who had

“turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God; and to wait for his son from heaven... which delivered us from the wrath to come” (1 Thess. 1:10).

These were people who had an expectation that before the Tribulation occurred they would be delivered from this awful judgment on the earth; *“from the wrath to come”*.

That the Thessalonians believed Christ could come at any moment, is evidenced by the fact that Paul had to write his second epistle to reassure them that the Day of the Lord **had not already come**, and they had not **therefore missed the Rapture**. They had misinterpreted the signs, but they fully expected the Rapture to occur in their lifetime.

Jesus stated:

“But of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father. Take ye heed, watch and pray: for ye know not when the time is” (Mark 13:32-33).

Bible prophecy however, is quite clear that there will be seven years of Tribulation immediately preceding the Lord's return to reign. That period is divided into two periods of 1,260 days. Antichrist will move into the Jewish Temple halfway through the seven years and once the Tribulation begins it will be possible to count the days to the return of Christ. So what did Jesus mean?

There is an event which will trigger the beginning of the Tribulation and that event is the Rapture of the Church. Only the Father knows the moment when the Church is complete and the *“fulness of the Gentiles”* has come in (Rom. 11:25). Acts 1:7 states that the times and seasons, or “when” events occur, *“the Father hath put in his own power”*.

Until the Father decides when the Rapture will be, the moment of all future events is unknown even to the Son of God. In this age the Holy Spirit is seeking a bride for Christ. When the bride is complete the Father will send His beloved Son into the air to call His bride to the wedding in heaven. The cry will go up, *“Come up hither!”* and we shall be for ever with our heavenly bridegroom.

The doctrine of imminence, the fact that Christ can return at any moment without the necessity of intervening signs or events, renders Premillennialism the most logical doctrine to embrace. These believers were expecting the Lord, and Paul, by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, encouraged them to do so.

THE PROMISE OF A KINGDOM.

The Thessalonians were exhorted to

*“walk worthy of God, who has called you **unto his kingdom and glory**”*

(1 Thess. 2:12).

There are several aspects of the Kingdom of God in Scripture. Every believer is now in the kingdom of God but there will be a future earthly Davidic kingdom established on earth at the second coming of Christ.

Paul wrote of the Lord Jesus Christ, *“who will judge the quick (living) and the dead **at his appearing and his kingdom**”*(2 Tim. 4:1). That judgment will involve the living nations that survive the Tribulation. The saved (sheep) nations inherit the millennial kingdom which will continue for a thousand years and then merge into eternity (Matt. 25:31-46).

Jesus said the kingdom would be established on earth WHEN He “will return from the wedding” (Luke 12:36). So the Rapture and the marriage of the Lamb to His Bride, take place before Christ comes to establish His earthly kingdom.

The marriage supper after He comes.

God’s resurrection program does not conclude until the end of the millennial kingdom when Christ will deliver up **the kingdom** to God (1 Cor. 15:23-24).

There is a heavenly kingdom where God reigns, and both Peter and Paul looked for it. (2 Tim. 4:18; 2Peter1:11); that kingdom is the subject of Revelation 21 and 22.

Paul closes this letter to this beloved Church by reminding them of the resources available to deal with any problem that would come their way. There was the Lord’s peace that passes understanding; the Lord’s presence, that is never failing; and God’s grace ever given.

May the consciousness of His presence daily fill our lives, and His grace prove sufficient as we wait for that wondrous call, ***“Come up hither!”***

Appendix – Did Jesus Teach a Pretribulation Rapture?

PAUL'S Epistles to the Thessalonians indicate clearly that the Rapture will take place **before** the Day of the Lord and **before** the appearance of the man of sin, but did Jesus teach a Rapture before the Tribulation? The answer is, Yes.

Some commentators have quite rightly pointed out that the Church did not begin until the Day of Pentecost, therefore all that is recorded in the four Gospels describes events that were enacted in the Age of Law. Jesus came to His own place; Israel. The disciples were instructed:

*“Go **not** in the way of the Gentiles...but go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel”* (Matt. 10:6).

When Jesus spoke of the Church He referred to it in the **future tense**, *“I will build my Church”* (Matt. 16:18).

While the Church began at Pentecost its character as the body of Christ was progressively revealed to Paul (Eph. 3:5) and recorded in his epistles. On this basis one would not expect to read of the Rapture of the Church in the Gospels since the Church was still a *“mystery... hid in God”* from the beginning of the world (Eph. 3:9).

However, since the sudden disappearance of millions of Christians must have a global impact it would be surprising if it were not included in the signs of the end of the age. The fact is that it is mentioned among the signs **to Israel** of the end of the age which precedes the return of Christ to establish His universal kingdom.

When the disciples asked the Lord, *“What shall be the sign of thy coming and of the end of the age?”* Jesus listed many events that would indicate that His coming was *“near, even at the doors”* (Matt. 24:33). One of those signs was **a global disappearance of individuals**. He could not say that it was the Church because the Church did not exist at that time and the truth of the Church awaited special revelation to Paul years later. So Jesus said,

*“As the days of Noah were, so shall the coming of the Son of man be. For as in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, **UNTIL** the flood came, and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. **THEN** shall two be in the field, the one shall be taken and the other left. Two women shall be grinding at the mill; the one shall be taken and the other left”* (Matt. 24:37-41).

In the context of the Lord's words this can only mean that the Tribulation is likened to the flood of Noah's day and just as God removed the righteous before

judgment fell, so there would be the sudden removal of individuals before the Tribulation began. This would be a sign to Israel.

The words used in the Greek text confirm that those who disappear are blessed for the word “*taken*” is “*paralambano*” meaning, “to receive to one’s self”. The word translated “*left*” is “*afeeymee*” meaning to “go away” and is used of a man divorcing, or “putting away”, his wife (1 Cor. 7:11).

Luke’s Gospel records the Lord’s words on another occasion when he gave the **signs of the approaching kingdom** and likened the end of the age to the days of Noah and Lot. He said,

*“The same day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven, and destroyed them all. **Even thus shall it be when the Son of man is revealed**”* (Luke 17:29-30).

Jesus again stated that at that time, “*one shall be taken and the other left*” (Luke 17:34-36). When the disciples asked, “*Where, Lord?*” Jesus answered, “*Wheresoever the body is, there will the eagles be gathered together*” (Luke 17:37).

The word used for “*body*” is “*soma*” meaning “a living body”. The word comes from “*sozo*” meaning, “to save”. A different word is used in Matt. 24:28 where it is “*ptoma*”, meaning “a rotting carcass”. The context of Matt. 24:28 is Armageddon where the carrion birds will devour the flesh of the slain. The context of Luke 17 is **the sign of missing persons** at the end of the age.

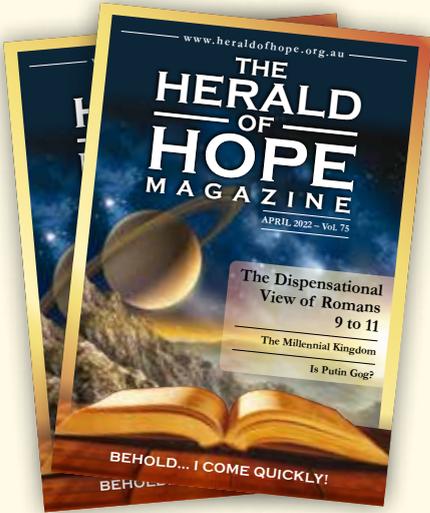
When Jesus said that the eagles will be gathered to the **living body** He was indicating that those taken would rise like eagles ascending higher and higher in the sky as they do when they catch a hot updraft, and thus answered the question of where those who disappear would be taken. They would be received to Himself.

There is no doubt the disciples could not have **understood** the Lord’s answer at the time but we should remember that much of Bible prophecy was sealed until the end times. Daniel was told:

*“The words are closed up and sealed **until the time of the end**... but the wise shall understand”* (Dan. 12:9-10).

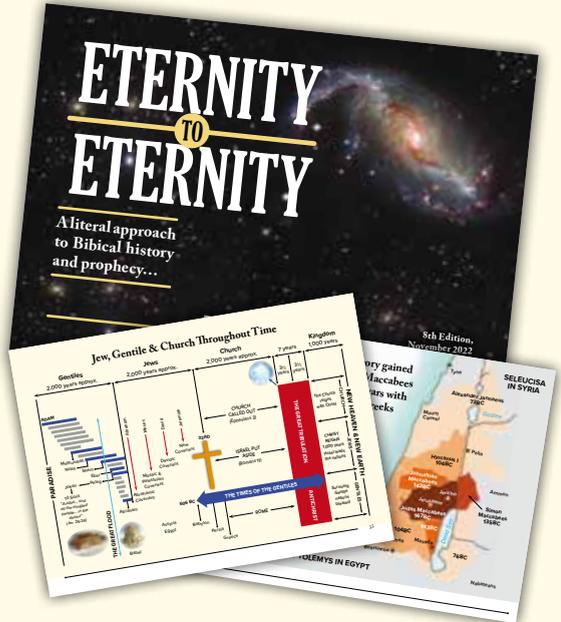
Finally, Jesus taught that He would return to establish His kingdom **after the wedding** (Luke 12:36). Since the Church is the wife of the Lamb (Rev. 19:7-8; Eph. 5:32) she must be in heaven BEFORE the second coming.

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Paul indicates that only Church-age
saints will be caught up at the Rapture.

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