

THE TIMING OF THE RAPTURE

2 Thessalonians 2:1-12

In his previous letter Paul taught the Thessalonians they would be rescued from *the day of the Lord* (Tribulation) by being gathered to Jesus before the beginning of *the day of the Lord* (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18). Since receiving that first letter, someone, somehow had begun to spread the lie that *the day of the Lord* had come and therefore, by implication, the Thessalonians would suffer the wrath of *the day of the Lord*. In this passage, the Apostle Paul confronted the lie and demonstrated decisively that *the day of the Lord* had not come. Paul assured the Thessalonians they would be rescued from *the day of the Lord* by the Rapture.

THE RAPTURE (2:1)

In this passage Paul clarified the timing of the Rapture by clarifying the timing of *the day of the Lord*. To understand Paul's explanation, we need to have a clear understanding of the Rapture.

The Description of the Rapture

(1 Thessalonians 4:15-17)

It is the coming of the Lord Jesus to gather the Church from the earth prior to *the day of the Lord*.

The Purpose of the Rapture¹

(1 Thessalonians 5:9)

It is to deliver the Church from the wrath of *the day of the Lord*.

The Timing of the Rapture

(1 Thessalonians 5:9)

It will occur before *the day of the Lord* begins.

THE DAY OF THE LORD² (2:2)

The day of the Lord (Tribulation) had not come; therefore, Paul comforted the Thessalonians telling them not to be shaken or alarmed. In verses 3-8 Paul explained how they could be certain *the day of the Lord* had not come (2:3-8). Three things must be fulfilled before *the day of the Lord* comes. This was true in the days of the Thessalonians and it remains true in our day. ***The day of the Lord will not come until 1) the apostasy of the Church³, 2) the man of lawlessness is revealed, and 3) the Restraiter ceases to restrain.***

None of these conditions had been met at the time Paul wrote to the Thessalonians in 51 A.D. and none of these conditions have been met since. *The day of the Lord* is still to be fulfilled in the future.

The apostasy of the Church will be a full-scale denial of the fundamental doctrines of biblical Christianity by liberal churches. The man of lawlessness will be definitively revealed when he signs a seven-year treaty with the nation of Israel (Daniel 9:24-27), however, he likely will be identified by activity leading up to the signing of the treaty. But before the man of lawlessness can be revealed, he must be released from the restraint of the Restraiter. Who is the Restraiter?

THE RESTRAINER (2:5-7)

- **The Restraiter referred to as “what” and “he”.**
Refers to a restraining person and a restraining device. Examples: a dog owner restrains her dog using a leash; a jailor restrains a prisoner using a jail cell.
- **The Restraiter restraining “now” in the days of Paul and the Thessalonians (51 A.D.).**
The Restraiter was restraining the man of lawlessness in the days of Paul and the Thessalonians in 51 A.D.

¹ Certainly, other purposes of the Rapture include the resurrection of dead Church-age believers and the clothing of both the dead and living with their resurrection bodies (1 Corinthians 15:42-44; 2 Corinthians 5:1-5).

² The day of the Lord is an idiom used to emphasize the swift and decisive nature of the Lord's victory over His enemies on any given occasion. The day of the Lord sometimes involves the judgment of God's people, including the Northern Kingdom at the hands of the Assyrians (Amos 5:18-20) and the Southern Kingdom at the hands of the Babylonians (Lamentations 1:12; 2:1, 21-22; Ezekiel 7). The day of the Lord often involves the judgment of foreign nations such as the devastation of the city of Babylon at the hands of the Medes (Isaiah 13) and the destruction of the Egyptians at the hands of the Babylonians (Jeremiah 46:10; Ezekiel 30:3). The day of the Lord to which the Apostle Paul refers in 1 Thessalonians 5:2 is the Great Tribulation, the same future time period Jesus described in Matthew 24:21-22a. According to Daniel 9:24-27, the day of the Lord will last seven years.

³ In verse 3, the ESV translates the Greek word *apostasia* as “rebellion” when it would be more accurate to translate it as “apostasy” as do the New American Standard Bible (1995) and the Holman Christian Standard Bible.

- **The Restrainer was restraining the man of lawlessness, not lawlessness in general.**

In verse 7b, the “it”, referring to “the mystery of lawlessness” is an unfortunate interpretive addition by the translators. It should read, “Only he who now restrains will do so until he is out of the way.”⁴

The Restrainer and the man of lawlessness both existed at the time of Paul and the Thessalonians (51 A.D.). Two thousand years later (2024) the man of lawlessness has still not been revealed. This is because he continues to be restrained by the Restrainer. If the Restrainer and man of lawlessness have existed for two thousand years (or more), this suggests they are not human beings but spirit beings.⁵ If the man of lawlessness is presently a spirit being, it will require him to take human form after he is released from the Restrainer because he will actively be involved with our human beings. In sum, it seems both the Restrainer and man of lawlessness are spirit beings. When the Restrainer ceases to restrain, the man of lawlessness will take human form in order to interact with and deceive humanity.

BIBLICAL SUPPORT

Spirit beings restrained (Jude 6; Rev. 20:1-3)

Spirit beings in opposition (Daniel 10:12-14)

Spirit beings called “men” (Gen. 18:1-2)

Spirit beings taking human form (Gen. 6:1-5; 18)

CONCLUSION

The generation of the Church that sees the apostasy of the church and to whom the man of lawlessness (antichrist) is revealed will be raptured and rescued from *the day of the Lord* (Tribulation). Presently, a spirit being referred to as the Restrainer is restraining the man of lawlessness who is himself a spirit being. At a point in the future, the Restrainer will cease restraining and the man of lawlessness, taking human form, will be unleashed on humanity. Empowered by Satan, he will engulf the world in unparalleled lawlessness. The man of lawlessness will be God’s means of punishing “all those who do not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness”. The seven years of *the day of the Lord* will culminate with the second coming of Jesus who will destroy the man of lawlessness and establish His glorious Messianic Kingdom on earth.

⁴ So also the NASB95 and HCSB.

⁵ Spirit beings are non-physical beings created by God whose domain is the spiritual world. There various types of spirit beings with varying levels of authority and jurisdiction (Daniel 10:12-14; Ephesians 6:12).