

## **UNDERSTANDING THAT WEIRD BOOK OF REVELATION - Part eleven**

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### **WILL THERE BE A SECRET RAPTURE OF THE CHURCH *BEFORE* THE SECOND COMING OF JESUS CHRIST?**

(Part 3)

**Revelation 10:5-7** - "And the angel whom I saw standing on the sea and on the land raised his right hand to heaven [6] and swore by him who lives forever and ever, who created heaven and what is in it, the earth and what is in it, and the sea and what is in it, that there would be no more delay, [7] but that *in the days of the trumpet call to be sounded by the seventh angel*, the mystery of God would be fulfilled, just as he announced to his servants the prophets."

We're spending some time in our study of the book of Revelation linking together some of the pertinent prophetic texts of the New Testament with John's vision in Revelation chapter ten. We're studying the "*days of the trumpet call to be sounded by the seventh angel*" (10:7). Notice again, "*days*", not "*day*." The last trumpet unfolds the sudden events of the seven bowls. The sounding of the last trumpet brings us right up to the events of the Second Coming of Jesus Christ and the end of this age.

What we're doing now is highlighting what the main events of these "*days*" are. We've studied Jesus teaching in **Matthew chapter 24**, Paul's teaching in **1 Thessalonians 4 and 5**, and now, Paul's teaching as it's revealed in **2 Thessalonians 2:**

**2 Thessalonians 2:1-17** - "Now concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered together to him, we ask you, brothers, [2] not to be quickly shaken in mind or alarmed, either by a spirit or a spoken word, or a letter seeming to be from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come. [3] Let no one deceive you in any way. For that day will not come, unless the rebellion comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, [4] who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God. [5] Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you these things? [6] And you know what is restraining him now so that he may be revealed in his time. [7] For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work. Only he who now restrains it will do so until he is out of the way. [8] And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will kill with the breath of his mouth and bring to nothing by the appearance of his coming. [9] The coming of the lawless one is by the activity of Satan with all power and false signs and wonders, [10] and with all wicked deception for those who are perishing, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. [11] Therefore God sends them a strong delusion, so that they may believe what is false, [12] in order that all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness. [13] But we ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers beloved by the Lord, because God chose you as the firstfruits to be saved, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth. [14] To this he called you through our gospel, so that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. [15] So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the traditions that you were taught by us, either by our spoken word or by our letter. [16] Now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God our Father, who loved us and gave us eternal comfort and good hope through grace, [17] comfort your hearts and establish them in every good work and word."

#### 1) **PAUL'S PURPOSE IN 2 THESSALONIANS CHAPTER 2**

This is a fascinating passage of Scripture. It continues the same subject as 1 Thessalonians 4 and 5, but with special emphasis on an additional question these Christians were asking. In 1 Thessalonians 4 and 5 Paul was dealing with a question about the future of those believers who were already dead and buried.

The members of the church were concerned that these deceased saints would miss out on the blessings of the Second Coming of Jesus Christ and Paul reassures them that these departed saints would be the very first ones to participate in the coming of Jesus Christ because the very first item on God's agenda was to resurrect them when the last trumpet sounded:

**1 Thessalonians 4:13-18** - "But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. [14] For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. [15] For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. [16] For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. [17] Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to

meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. [18] Therefore encourage one another with these words.”

Now, while still discussing the Second Coming of Jesus Christ, Paul, in 2 Thessalonians chapter 2, addressed a very different question. Apparently, at least some of the Christians in this church were upset and confused about the **timing** of the Second Coming. In fact, some of them were disturbed by the thought that they had actually **missed** the whole thing - that it had already happened:

**2 Thessalonians 2:1-2** - “Now concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered together to him, we ask you, brothers, [2] not to be quickly shaken in mind or alarmed, either by a spirit or a spoken word, or a letter seeming to be from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come.”

2) **WHAT WAS THE ERROR IN THE CHRISTIANS IN THE THESSALONIAN CHURCH THAT PAUL WAS TRYING TO CORRECT?**

The key issue at hand is the meaning of that phrase, “**...the day of the Lord....**” - “**....not to be quickly shaken in mind or alarmed, either by a spirit or a spoken word, or a letter seeming to be from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come.**” These Christians were in a state of unrest and turmoil because they thought the “**day of the Lord**” had already arrived.

So the key point in understanding this passage is knowing what is meant by that phrase “**the day of the Lord.**” There are two possible interpretations:

- a) Many pre-tribulationists interpret that phrase to mean the **secret rapture of the church**. They tell us that these Thessalonian believers were upset because they felt they had missed out on the rapture and were, as a result, going right into the Great Tribulation.

Now, it's right in this passage that I find the pre-tribulationist position the most unlikely to accept. Paul's answer to these disturbed Christians is the **last** thing you would expect him to say if these Christians were afraid they had missed the pre-tribulationist rapture.

Look at his response: **2 Thessalonians 2:3-5** - “Let no one deceive you in any way. For **that day will not come, unless the rebellion comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, [4] who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God. [5] Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you these things?**”

These are very significant words. If Paul were a pre-tribulationist, and if these Christians were truly worried they had missed the pre-trib rapture, here's what I think he would have said: “No, don't worry. You haven't missed the rapture. The rapture hasn't happened yet. How do I know? Because you are all still here!

And, what's more, I'm still here for you to refer your questions! And what's more “**all the churches of God**” (**2 Thessalonians 1:4**) are still here too. So of course the rapture hasn't happened yet. If the rapture **has** happened that would mean that all of you, and all of the church of God, and I too, have missed it!”

That, it seems to me, is how Paul would have answered their question if he believed in an any-moment, secret rapture of the church of Jesus Christ before the tribulation. But Paul doesn't say anything like that. And that leads right into the second solution to these Christians' concern and Paul's solution to their troubled minds:

- b) These Thessalonian Christians weren't troubled because they thought they had missed a pre-trib rapture. Neither they, nor Paul had any concept of a pre-trib rapture in their minds. None of the early church did.

These Christians were concerned because of a misunderstanding that grew out of the **present** persecution and suffering they were experiencing for their new faith in Jesus Christ:

**1 Thessalonians 1:6** - “And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you received the word **in much affliction, with the joy of the Holy Spirit....**”

**2 Thessalonians 1:4** - “Therefore we ourselves boast about you in the churches of God for your

**steadfastness and faith in all your persecutions and in the afflictions that you are enduring.”**

Now some of their questions begin to come together. They probably had mistakenly come to the conclusion that they had actually entered into the final Great Tribulation. They were experiencing such intense persecution that this would not be a big stretch in their thinking. Then, because they were, in their minds, into the Tribulation, they knew from Paul's previous teaching, and perhaps teaching passed on orally from Jesus Himself, that the Second Coming of Christ was bound to happen very soon.

This false conclusion had very real effects on their present behavior. Paul found a church full of people who were quitting their jobs and not providing for their families. That's why Paul had to remind them to stay with their present jobs and be disciplined in their daily responsibilities:

**2 Thessalonians 3:7-13 - “For you yourselves know how you ought to imitate us, because we were not idle when we were with you, [8] nor did we eat anyone's bread without paying for it, but with toil and labor we worked night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you. [9] It was not because we do not have that right, but to give you in ourselves an example to imitate. [10] For even when we were with you, we would give you this command: If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat. [11] For we hear that some among you walk in idleness, not busy at work, but busybodies. [12] Now such persons we command and encourage in the Lord Jesus Christ to do their work quietly and to earn their own living. [13] As for you, brothers, do not grow weary in doing good.”**

You can see Paul's emphasis in these words. He's telling them to stay focused on their present responsibilities. They are to not become undisciplined or lazy or unruly. Notice all the encouragements to remain **faithful** and **busy** and **disciplined** and to **persevere** and to **not grow weary**.

**WHY?** Why were they to stay calm and not be shaken in their approach to life? Paul tells them **they will know when the Second Coming is drawing near**. They won't have to guess. They will have time to **see the signs**.

In other words, the nature of Paul's response is exactly what you would expect it to be if he believed that the rapture of the church took place right at the Second Coming of Jesus Christ and the resurrection of the dead in Christ (just as we studied in **1 Thessalonians 4 and 5**).

And here's the important point for this study: Paul clearly tells these Christians - most of whom are Gentiles, not Jews - that they will be here to **see** the uprising of the antichrist. If they weren't going to be here to **see** the antichrist because they would already be gone in a pre-trib rapture it would make little sense to give such a description of him or to make his presence a **sign** that the Second Coming was drawing near.

**Why would Paul try to convince these people that the day of the Lord had not come by pointing out a man of lawlessness they were never going to see anyway?** In other words, mentioning the antichrist is exactly what you **would** say if you wanted these Christians to realize they weren't in the Tribulation yet, because the antichrist hadn't **appeared** yet and they would be **here** to see him when he arrives on the scene.

### 3) **THE GREAT DECEPTION AND FALLING AWAY IN THE LAST DAYS**

**2 Thessalonians 2:8-17 - “And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will kill with the breath of his mouth and bring to nothing by the appearance of his coming. [9] The coming of the lawless one is by the activity of Satan with all power and false signs and wonders, [10] and with all wicked deception for those who are perishing, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. [11] Therefore God sends them a strong delusion, so that they may believe what is false, [12] in order that all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.[13] But we ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers beloved by the Lord, because God chose you as the firstfruits to be saved, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth. [14] To this he called you through our gospel, so that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. [15] So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the traditions that you were taught by us, either by our spoken word or by our letter.[16] Now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God our Father, who loved us and gave us eternal comfort and good hope through grace, [17] comfort your hearts and establish them in every good work and word.”**

There is more in these verses than we can study in this teaching. But let me highlight some points that seem particularly important for the church:

- a) ***People who base their faith on signs and wonders will be in deep trouble in the last days - 2 Thessalonians 2:9-10*** - "The coming of the lawless one is by the activity of Satan with all power and false signs and wonders, [10] and with all wicked deception for those who are perishing, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved."

There is such strong warning here ***not*** to make signs and wonders the criteria of divine truth. We certainly ***should*** embrace Scriptural manifestations of the work of the Holy Spirit among us. Paul's letter to the same church at Thessalonica include the encouragement to ***not despise prophecy***, etc. We ***should*** welcome the working of the Lord among us. But we should never ***measure*** anything as genuinely from the Lord just ***because*** it is miraculous. As Paul says, we are to ***"test everything"*** by God's Word.

- b) ***The choice before all of us is to love the truth or to perish - 2 Thessalonians 2:10-12*** - "...and with all wicked deception for those who are perishing, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. [11] Therefore God sends them a strong delusion, so that they may believe what is false, [12] in order that all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness."

These are profound words. What makes people so vulnerable to deception? What puts lives in such incredible peril? The answer smashes in on a relativistic culture and church: ***2 Thessalonians 2:10b*** - "...because they refused to love the truth and so be saved." It's not enough to ***know*** the truth. Lives aren't preserved by ***knowing*** the truth. They are preserved and saved by ***loving*** the truth.

What do you love ***most*** about going to church? What excites you ***most*** about the Christian faith? What gives you the ***most*** pleasure in daily living? I have no hesitation at all to say that Paul would say you and I should give the same answer to ***all*** those questions. We are passionately in love with the truth. We don't just ***praise*** the truth. We ***prize*** the truth. We use the spade of truth to dig up the soil around the weeds of error that crowd around our minds until the light can't get it. We uproot the lies of this age with the truth of God's Word. We kick out of our schedules activities that pour error into our minds.

That's how you keep your heart ready for the coming of Jesus. And that's how you and I will know the signs of the times in advance so we're not caught off guard.