

WILL THERE BE A SECRET RAPTURE OF THE CHURCH SEPARATE FROM THE SECOND COMING?

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."

This is a very quick study of the events of the "**days of the trumpet call to be sounded by the seventh angel**"(10:7). As the seventh angel sounds (and the contents of the seven bowls of God's wrath are poured out) a series of connected events rapidly unfolds on the earth. In Matthew chapter 24 Jesus links the events of the last days, just as the angel in Revelation chapter 10, with the **sounding of a trumpet** (24:29-31). In fact, this is repeated throughout the pertinent New Testament Scriptures:

Matthew 24:31 - "And he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other."

1 Corinthians 15:52 - "...in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed."

1 Thessalonians 4:16 - "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."

- 1) **THE PURPOSE OF PAUL'S WORDS IN 1 THESSALONIANS** - **1 Thessalonians 4:13** - "But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep, so that you will not grieve as do the rest who have no hope."

There are some people who think the reason for Paul's words in this text is Christian people are worried their departed loved ones will miss out on the **rapture** of the church and not be raised from the dead until the **Second Coming** (usually thought to be seven years later, after the Great Tribulation). I think this is a very unlikely interpretation for the following reasons:

- a) Why would these Christians be so concerned that their departed loved ones would miss out on the rapture and have to wait until the Second Coming to have their bodies raised from the dead? In Paul's theology these departed loved ones were presently with the Lord in paradise. I think there is a much better explanation for these believers' concern:
- b) The **context** of Paul's response give a clue to these Christians' concern. Paul told them not to grieve "**as do the rest who have no hope.**" Some of these Christians were mourning their lost loved ones as though there was no resurrection from the dead. They were of the false understanding that only those who were **alive** would experience the blessings associated with the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. These Christians were thinking like those described in **1 Corinthians 15:12** - "Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?" Paul urges these believers to remember the reality of the resurrection of **all** believers when Jesus comes again. No one will be left out.

- 2) **IN PAUL'S UNDERSTANDING, THE RESURRECTION OF DEPARTED BELIEVERS TAKES PLACE AT THE SECOND COMING OF JESUS CHRIST** - **1 Thessalonians 4:14-18** - "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."

- a) **Those who have died do not miss any of the great end-time events** (14-15). Even if they have been dead for a thousand years, Paul says they will **see** the coming of the Lord in glory.
- b) **The resurrection of departed saints, the rapture of the living saints, and the Second Coming of Jesus Christ all take place at the sounding of a great trumpet** (16-18). Paul says he received all of this truth from the Lord Himself ("**by the word of the Lord**" - 15).

- 3) **HOW THE DAY OF THE LORD COMES LIKE A THIEF** - **1 Thessalonians 5:1-3** - "Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers, you have no need to have anything written to you. [2] For you yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. [3] While people are saying, "There is peace and security," then sudden destruction will come upon them as labor pains come upon a pregnant woman, and they will not escape."

- a) **Christ's coming will only come upon unbelievers like a thief. Believers will not be surprised by the coming of Jesus Christ** - **1 Thessalonians 5:4-5** - "But you are not in darkness, brothers, for that day to surprise you like a thief. [5] For you are all children of light, children of the day. We are not of the night or of the darkness."
- b) **Notice the use of that phrase, "the day of the Lord"**(5:2). Paul uses that very same phrase in **2 Thessalonians 2:1-3** - "Now we request you, brethren, with regard to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, {2} that you not be quickly shaken from your composure or be disturbed either by a spirit or a message or a letter as if from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come. {3} Let no one in any way deceive you, for it will not come unless the apostasy comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction...."

The issue Paul was addressing in **1 Thessalonians chapters 4 and 5** was the concern for the saints who were already in their graves - that the glorious events of the Second Coming would have no meaning for them, being already dead.

The issue Paul is addressing in **2 Thessalonians chapter 2** is quite different. Paul writes to people who are afraid they have somehow missed the events of the day of the Lord. Paul says they were "**shaken**" and "**disturbed**" by this misunderstanding. We've already seen that they felt the day of the Lord was already upon them. But what exactly did that phrase mean to them? There are two common interpretations to Paul's words in **2 Thessalonians chapter 2**:

- i) **Pre-tribulationists** take this text to mean these Christians were afraid they had missed the rapture and Paul was trying to assure them they had not. I find this explanation unsatisfying because Paul's answer to them is the **last** thing you would expect him to say if these Christians were thinking they had somehow missed a pre-tribulational rapture:

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 important words. If Paul and these believers were all pre-tribulationists, and if these people were worried they had missed the rapture of the church, here's what I would have expected Paul to say: “Don't worry. Obviously you haven't missed the rapture because ***you're still here***. More importantly, ***I'm still here answering your questions!*** Also, ***“all the churches of God”*** are still here (**2 Thessalonians 1:4**). So don't worry. There's no way we have ***all*** missed the rapture!”

But Paul doesn't say anything at all like that. And this leads into the ***second explanation*** concerning this text:

- ii) These Christians were concerned because of the extreme nature of the persecution they were presently facing:

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.***”

Because of the ***extreme persecution*** they were facing, someone came up with the idea that they were already in the Great Tribulation. And, from the previous teaching they had received from Paul, they knew if they ***were*** in the Great Tribulation, the Second Coming was right around the corner.

This misunderstanding was not without effect on their daily living. Paul says many of them were quitting their jobs. They weren't taking care of their responsibilities to their families and loved ones. They were all becoming weird and unstable and undisciplined in their daily walk with the Lord (see **2 Thessalonians 3:7-13**).

Paul's solution to this problem is to tell these Christians they need not worry about having missed the day of the Lord because the coming of that day will be ***identifiable in advance***. Paul tells them that Christians will be able to see the rising up of the antichrist ***before*** the day of the Lord comes. ***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 if the rapture took place before the Tribulation?***

In other words, mentioning the antichrist is exactly what we ***would*** expect Paul to say if he wanted to assure these Christians they couldn't possibly be in the Great Tribulation without knowing it.