

3 WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

What?/ What is the next event that will happen preceding the return of the Lord. The Rapture? The rise of Antichrist? The Rebellion? What are these events any way and how do they fit together. **Why?/** There is much confusion and many different opinions as to how the biblical revelation lays out the flow of events that are yet to occur. We need to carefully consider some key passages that seem to indicate what will happen next. **How?/** By examining several key texts that seem to fit together we can develop a pretty good picture of what will happen next.

3.1 WHAT did Paul reveal about the return of the Christ and the Day of the Lord?

2 Thessalonians 2:1-12 Now regarding [1] **the arrival (*parousia*) of our Lord Jesus Christ** and [2] **our being gathered to be with him**, we ask you, brothers and sisters, 2 not to be easily shaken from your composure or disturbed by any kind of spirit or message or letter allegedly from us, to the effect that [3] **the day of the Lord** is already here. 3 Let no one deceive you in any way. For that day will not arrive until [4] **the rebellion** comes and [5] **the man of lawlessness is revealed**, the son of destruction. 4 He opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, and as a result he takes his seat in God's temple, displaying himself as God.

5 Surely you recall that I used to tell you these things while I was still with you. 6 And so you know [6] **what holds him back**, so that he will be revealed in his own time. 7 [7] For **the hidden power of lawlessness is already at work**. However, [6] **the one who holds him back** will do so until he is taken out of the way, 8 and then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord will destroy by the breath of his mouth and wipe out by the manifestation (*epiphaneia*) of his [1] **arrival (*parousia*)**.

9 The arrival (*parousia*) of the lawless one will be **by Satan's working with all kinds of miracles and signs and false wonders**, 10 and with every kind of evil deception directed against those who are perishing, because they found no place in their hearts for the truth so as to be saved. 11 Consequently God sends on them **a deluding influence** so that they will believe what is false. 12 And so all of them who have not believed the truth but have delighted in evil will be condemned.

3.1.1 What is the CONTEXT of 1 and 2 Thessalonians?

In Acts 17, Paul preached the Gospel in the Synagogue at Thessalonica for 3 weeks on his second missionary journey. This caused a great **disturbance** among some of the Jews and led to an **uprising**. Paul and his associates were accused of “turning the world upside down” (Acts 17:6).

The Thessalonian Christians in turn had endured **persecution** and **affliction** (1 Thess. 1:6, 3:3 - the word used here is the same word that Jesus uses of “tribulation” - suffering, affliction). Paul writes both letters to encourage this church in the midst of its suffering and persecution. He deals with several issues related to the last days and the return of the Lord.

In the 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 Paul addresses a question that had arisen about loved ones who had already died - what would happen to them when the Lord returns? We will deal with this in more detail when we consider the Rapture question. Paul had also reminded the church in 1 Thessalonians that the Day of the Lord would come like a “thief in the night” catching the world unprepared (1 Thess. 5:1-3). This Day, however, would not catch believers unprepared (1 Thess. 5:4-11).

In the 1 Thessalonians, Paul makes it clear that Jesus would deliver His people from the coming wrath of God:

1Thessalonians 1:9 (ESV) For they themselves report concerning us the kind of reception we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, 10 and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, ***Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.***

1Thessalonians 5:9 (ESV) ***For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ,*** 10 who died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep we might live with him. 11 Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing.

There were still some unanswered questions, however, and in 2 Thessalonians Paul writes to clarify some ***misunderstanding about the Day of the Lord and the possibility that it may have already arrived.***

3.1.2 [1] The Arrival of Our Lord Jesus

There is a critical word used in this passage - the “**arrival**” of our Lord Jesus. The word used here is ***parousia*** and it means “to arrive or to come to be present.” The focus on the usage of this word when used with persons is that a person is “personally present.”

The usage of this word is debated among scholars. In most of the passages that are relevant to the return of Christ, the word seems to indicate ***the personal presence of Jesus*** at His return at the end of the Tribulation period. The main question that is hotly debated is whether this word “***parousia***” could also refer to a “hidden” return of Jesus before the end of the Tribulation to “rapture” the church

age saints. We will consider this in detail when we discuss the Rapture in the last lessons.

3.1.3 [2] Our Being Gathered Together (to Be) With Him

The phrase, “being gathered together with” is just one word in Greek. The root of this verb is the word from which we get the term “synagogue.” It simply means a “gathering together” of people. The verbal form of this noun is used by Jesus in both Matthew 24:31 and Mark 13:27 to refer to the “gathering” of His elect/chosen ones at the end of the Great Tribulation.

3.1.4 [3] The Day of the Lord

» ***The Day of the Lord is the period of God's final judgment of the Earth. It is probably equivalent to the last 3 ½ years of this present age - the Great Tribulation.***

“In the Old Testament “the Day of the Lord” could designate a day in the immediate historical future when God would visit his people in judgment (Amos 5:18; cf. Isa. 2:12ff.). It could also designate the final visitation of God when he would establish his Kingdom in the world, bringing salvation to his faithful people and judgment to the wicked (Zeph. 1:14ff.; Joel 3:14ff.). In the New Testament the term has become a technical expression for the day when God will visit the world to bring this age to its end and to inaugurate the Age to Come. ***The term is not to be thought of as a single calendar but as the entire period that will witness the final redemptive visitation of God in Christ.*** (George E. Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, 554-55. Emphasis mine)

» ***The Day will come suddenly and unexpectedly.***

1Thessalonians 5:1 Now as to the times and the epochs, brethren, you have no need of anything to be written to you. **2 For you yourselves know full well that the day of the Lord will come just like a thief in the night.** **3** While they are saying, “Peace and safety!” then destruction will come upon them suddenly like birth pangs upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape. **4 But you, brethren, are not in darkness, that the day should overtake you like a thief;...**

» ***The Day will bring the end of the present creation.***

2Peter 3:10 But **the day of the Lord** will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up.

» **Positively, the Day of the Lord is also “The Day of Christ” - a day of salvation, not judgment, for all of us who belong to Christ.**

Philippians 1:6 For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus.

2 Corinthians 1:14 just as you also partially did understand us, that we are your reason to be proud as you also are ours, in the day of our Lord Jesus.

3.1.5 [4] The Rebellion

The rebellion that Paul speaks of here may be alluded to in several other places in the New Testament. I believe this is generally what Jesus is referring to in Matthew 24:10-12. In each of the following passages, the “difficult” and “dark” times of the Last Days is emphasized.

» **There will be a rejection of True Godliness.**

2 Timothy 3:1-5 But understand this, that *in the last days* difficult times will come. 2 For people will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, 3 unloving, irreconcilable, slanderers, without self-control, savage, opposed to what is good, 4 treacherous, reckless, conceited, loving pleasure rather than loving God. 5 *They will maintain the outward appearance of godliness but will have repudiated its power. So avoid people like these.*

» **There will be a rejection/desertion of the Faith.**

1 Timothy 4:1-3 Now the Spirit explicitly says that *in the later times some will desert the faith and occupy themselves with deceiving spirits and demonic teachings*, 2 influenced by the hypocrisy of liars whose consciences are seared. 3 They will prohibit marriage and require abstinence from foods that God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth.

» **There will be a rejection of Christ.**

1 John 2:18-19 Children, *it is the last hour*, and just as you heard that the *antichrist is coming*, so now many antichrists have appeared. **We know from this that it is the last hour.** 19 They went out from us, but they did not really belong to us, because if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us. But they went out from us to demonstrate that all of them do not belong to us.

» ***There will be a rejection of the reality of the Lord's return.***

2 Peter 3:3-4 Above all, understand this: ***In the last days*** blatant scoffers will come, being propelled by their own evil urges and saying, “*Where is his promised return? For ever since our ancestors died, all things have continued as they were from the beginning of creation.*”

Jude 1:17-21 But you, dear friends — recall the predictions foretold by the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ. 18 ***For they said to you, “In the end time there will come scoffers, propelled by their own ungodly desires.”*** 19 These people are divisive, worldly, devoid of the Spirit. 20 But you, dear friends, by building yourselves up in your most holy faith, by praying in the Holy Spirit, 21 *maintain yourselves in the love of God, while anticipating the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that brings eternal life.*

» ****The Rebellion will occur within “Christendom” and not just “in the World.”***

3.1.6 [5] The Man of Lawlessness (Antichrist, the Beast)

» ***This is the one who will bring the “abomination of desolation” referred to by Jesus (Matthew 24:15, Mark 13:14) and Daniel (11:31, 12:1). He will enter the Temple of God and proclaim himself to be god.***

» ***This is the Antichrist of 1 John 2:18.***

» ***This is the Beast of Revelation 13-17.***

3.1.7 [6] “What / the one” who holds him back...

Scholars are greatly divided in identifying “the one who holds back/restrains” in this passage. The problem that all solutions face is one based on the grammar of the text. The “restrainer” is identified by both *neuter* and *masculine* gender; this implies that the “restrainer” is both a “thing” and a “person.” There are eight major solutions proposed for this issue:

- 1. Roman Empire** and Emperor
- 2. Government**, Civil Law and Order in general
- 3. The Jewish state**
- 4. Satan** or one of his demons
- 5. False teachers** within the church “seize” instead of “restrain”
- 6. Michael the Archangel.** Michael appears in Daniel 12:1 and Revelation 12:7 in the context of the beginning of the Great Distress/Suffering/Tribulation.

7. The **Holy Spirit**

8. The **Proclamation of the Gospel**

Ultimately, knowing the precise identity of this “restrainer” may not make that much of a difference in understanding the meaning of this passage. What is clear is that there is *someone* who is holding the “power of lawlessness” in check until the appropriate time. This implies some super-human power. Since Paul does not name this restrainer specifically, we should resist the temptation to be dogmatic on any view. ***What is sure is that at the appropriate time, the Man of Lawlessness will be revealed.***

KEY NOTE / *Many dispensational pre-tribulation rapture theorists have argued that the “restrainer” **must** be a reference to the Holy Spirit and therefore implies the Rapture of the church before the Tribulation. This view, however, strains the limits of this text. It may be that this is a reference to the removal of the **restraining influence** of the Holy Spirit, but it **almost certainly cannot** mean the removal of the Spirit’s **presence**. The Spirit is in some sense omnipresent. Also, we know from Revelation 7:14 that there will be many who come to faith during the Great Tribulation. The Spirit’s presence on Earth will be necessary for this reason. Although I come from the dispensational tradition and I agree that this may in fact be a reference to the **restraining influence** of the Spirit, there is no reason to demand that this be a reference to the Rapture of the church.*

3.1.8 [7] The Hidden power of Lawlessness

See 1 John 2:18-19 for a parallel.

3.2 WHY is the material so problematic?

- » ***As with all prophetic texts, there is a general vagueness in terms of the “when” and “how” things will come to pass. Prophetic utterances are only 100% clear in hindsight.***
- » ***This text, along with others, seem to argue against the view that the Lord could return at any minute. If the Rapture could happen at any minute, then why does Paul not use this as a proof that the Day of the Lord had not arrived?***
- » ***Taken at face value, these texts seem to contradict much popular teaching on the end times.***

3.3 HOW do we respond?

2 Thessalonians 2:13-17

But we ought to thank God always for you, brothers and sisters loved by the Lord, *because God chose you from*

the beginning for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth. 14 He called you to this salvation through our gospel, so that you may possess the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. 15 Therefore, brothers and sisters, stand firm and hold on **to the traditions that we taught you**, whether by speech or by letter. 16 Now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and by grace gave us eternal comfort and good hope, 17 **encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good thing you do or say.**

- » ***We can know for certain that we are not destined for any form of God's wrath.***
- » ***We must also remember that we might endure persecution and affliction before the Lord returns.***
- » ***We should remember that knowing how all things will end should motivate us to holy, godly living in the present.***

Preparing for Next Week:

Read Daniel 9-12. There is a lot of difficult material in this section. However, focus on 9:24-27, 11:20-44, 12:1-13. We will discuss chapter 9 in some detail next week. It is important to have read through 9:24-27 before we meet.
