

Why the Church Cannot Be Part of the Tribulation Period

(Explanation of 2 Thessalonians Chapter 2:1-7)

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Many are confused regarding the prophetic information that Paul was teaching in 2 Thessalonians 2:1-7. Let's recap this teaching in a simple manner to understand why the Church cannot be on earth during the Tribulation Period. Yes, Paul taught the "fly away" pretribulation doctrine regarding the Rapture. The saints would be raptured prior to the commencement of the Tribulation Period. Follow his reasoning.

Paul begins in 2 Thessalonians 2:1:

"Now we beseech you (*make an appeal to you*), **brethren, by** (*on behalf or because of*) **the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him** (*the appeal was to correct the error regarding the timing of the Rapture and to confirm the truth about a pretribulation Rapture of the Church*).

Paul speaks of the Rapture of the Church in verse one. His appeal is corrective in nature because of the error that was being propagated concerning the timing of the Rapture. Some false teachers were promoting that the Rapture was not pretribulation and that the saints had already entered the Day of the Lord (Tribulation Period). But Paul reassures them that our gathering unto the Lord in the air above and into the heavenly home He has prepared for us (John 14:1-3) is the glorious destiny of the Church – not the Day of the Lord. Paul's appeal was to support pretribulationism. The Rapture reminder is designed to reassure the saints that the timing of this event has not changed.

This is why Paul goes on to write in 2 Thessalonians 2:2: **“That ye be not soon shaken (stirred up) in mind (do not experience mental agitation, which effects your emotional thinking and mental moorings, but continue to have clear and stable understanding of the truth regarding a pretribulation Rapture), or be troubled (disturbed, frightened and alarmed), neither by spirit (a prophetic utterance allegedly from the Holy Spirit but is actually from a false spirit – 1 John 4:1), word (a false report from a false preacher) nor by letter as from us (a false letter with Paul’s forged signature and confirmed by Silas and Timothy, Paul’s partners), as that the day of Christ is at hand”** (“enistemi” - is now present, hath arrived, hath set in, or has come).

The Thessalonian church had developed a major eschatological misconception. Let me put it in layman’s terms. Somebody was trying to pull the wool over their eyes! Apparently some of the saints bought into the error and believed they had already entered the Tribulation Period based upon prophetic messages and reports from false apostles opposing Paul’s teaching on the pretribulation Rapture of the Church. They had concluded that the Thessalonian Christians had entered the Tribulation Period. The errant teaching probably first came through a “prophetic utterance” in one of their meetings, and then it was further enhanced by a letter claiming to come from Paul himself.

To prove pretribulationism, Paul reasons from the viewpoint of the Tribulation Period. He essentially concludes: “You are not living in the Day of the Christ/Lord since these Tribulation events have not occurred on earth.”

2 Thessalonians 2:3-7

“Let no man deceive you by any means (that you are living in the Day of Christ/Lord or Tribulation Period): for that day shall not come (cannot be present on the earth), except there come (except these events are now present, have set in, or have arrived on earth, as some falsely claimed, signaling the Day of the Lord has begun, is present, and underway as indicated in verse 2 – “at hand”), a (the) falling away first (THE RELIGIOUS APOSTASY OF THE TRIBULATION PERIOD), and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition (THE REVELATION OF ANTICHRIST WHO IS THE INSTIGATOR OF THE APOSTASY – the revelation occurring in conjunction with the apostasy as explained next);

“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 (*THE REPULSIVE CHARACTER OF THE APOSTASY*). Remember ye not, that, when I was yet with you, I told you these things? And now ye know what withholdeth (*holds back or restrains*) that he might be revealed in his time (*the Antichrist*). For the mystery of iniquity (*a New Testament revelation of the Holy Spirit indwelling the Church though which lawlessness is suppressed, keeping evil and spiritual anarchy in check, not allowing wickedness to completely overtake the earth with the emergence and apostasy of Antichrist worship*) doth already work (*in germ or seed form today*): only he who now letteth (*restrains*) will let, until he (*the Holy Spirit*) be taken out of the way” (*THE ROMOVAL OF THE RESTRAINER WHICH RESULTS IN THE APOSTASY – the Holy Spirit is not spatially removed but His functionality of suppressing sin is removed*).

Why the Church Cannot Be Part of the Tribulation Period

Removal of Restrainer and RAPTURE

This Event Must Occur
Before the Tribulation
Period Can Begin

The removal of the Restrainer (Holy Spirit) results in the removal or Rapture of the Church through which the Holy Spirit restrains sin and evil (2 Thessalonians 2:7). You cannot have one without the other.

Religious Apostasy and Revelation of Antichrist

These Events Occur After the Rapture
and are Triggered by the Removal of
the Restrainer and Church

When Paul states, “for except there come ... first” (2 Thess. 2:3) he is teaching that except (unless) the events of the revelation and apostasy of Antichrist are presently occurring on earth, the earth has not entered the Tribulation Period. Paul is not saying these events will happen before the Day of the Lord begins but that they must first occur in order for planet earth to be in the Day of the Lord. Since these events have not occurred, the saints are not living in the Tribulation but are exempt from it (Rev. 3:10).

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In other words, the Tribulation Period has not occurred (is not present on earth) because none of these events (the religious apostasy and revelation of Antichrist) have transpired which are part of the Day of the Lord/Christ when He unleashes His judgments over the earth (Rev. 3:10). Since the Restrainer (along with the presence of the Church) has not been removed to trigger these evil events on earth (2 Thess. 2:7-8), the world has not entered the Tribulation Period. This means the Church could not possibly be living during the time of Tribulation but would be exempt from it (1 Thess. 1:10; 5:9-11).

In summary, Paul says that in order for the Church to be living in the Tribulation Period, as some were teaching, there must “first” (2 Thess. 2:3) be a specific religious departure that consists of Antichrist deification and worship (**Point #1**). This occurs in conjunction with the revelation of the Antichrist who will at a specific point in time reveal his true identity by declaring himself to be God and demanding worship (**Point #2**). The first two events are distinct and yet interrelated. Next, the apostasy will occur because of the removal of the restraining ministry of the Holy Spirit (2 Thess. 2:7) and indicates the removal of the Church since the Spirit restrains sin through presence of the Church (**Point #3**).

Since none of these events have occurred the Church cannot be living in the time period known as the Day of the Lord (Tribulation Period). In fact, one event occurs before the Tribulation Period begins (removal of the Restrainer with the Church) and the other two events (the revelation and apostasy of Antichrist) are the result of the removal of the Spirit’s restraining work, and they occur after the Rapture to indicate the Tribulation Period has begun. In short, the Church could not possibly be living on earth during the Tribulation Period for the Church is raptured prior to the revelation of the man of sin and his End Time apostasy, which occurs during the Tribulation Period, when Antichrist proclaims himself to be the only true God (2 Thess. 2:4).

In these verses Paul attempts to correct the error that the Church had entered the Day of the Lord (Tribulation Period). He points out that the major events of the Day of the Lord had not occurred and there was no evidence that the day had already begun. This is because three events must occur for the earth to officially be in the Day of the Lord – the religious apostasy, the revelation of Antichrist, and the removal of the Restrainer. Hence, the Thessalonian Christians could find comfort in

the facts that Paul presents. Since these Tribulation events have not occurred, there is no reason to be alarmed that they were living during the Day of the Lord.

The sense and flow of Paul's thought is this. Be reassured that what I taught you about our pretribulation gathering unto the Lord in the event of the Rapture is true (2 Thess. 2:1-2). It will happen just as I taught. The reasons for this are threefold: 1) the apostasy of the Day of the Lord has NOT occurred, 2) the man of sin who is the leader and instigator of this apostasy has NOT been revealed, and 3) the restraining ministry of the Holy Spirit has NOT been removed from the earth (along with the Church) to bring about the apostasy (2 Thess. 2:3). Case closed! Pretribulationism is true.

Robert Thomas concludes:

“The readers had not missed the rapture (1 Thess 4:15–17) and were not in the day of the Lord (v. 2) because these two clear indicators of the day's presence had not yet appeared. So the absence of the phenomena demonstrates the non-presence of the Day of the Lord. Obviously, had ‘the rebellion’ and the revealing of ‘the man of lawlessness’ already taken place when Paul was writing this letter, then the teaching of the priority of the rapture to ‘the day of the Lord’ would have been called into question.”

Additional Note on the Order of Events: In 2 Thessalonians 2:3, Paul is not looking at two events (apostasy and revelation of Antichrist) that must occur *before* the Tribulation Period begins (this makes no sense) but events that must *already exist* on earth for the Day of the Lord to be present, as Paul clearly taught by the previous word construction “the day of Christ is at hand” (2 Thess. 2:2), referring to events that have set in, which are already present, underway, or have arrived on earth, signaling the Day of the Lord has already begun.

In other words, Paul is not viewing the first two events mentioned (apostasy and revelation of Antichrist) as occurring before the Tribulation Period but after its commencement. This alone would provide the needed comfort for the saints since many of them had espoused the error that they were living during the period of the Day of the Lord (Tribulation Period).

The Moody Bible Commentary correctly asserts:

“The Thessalonians could know that the day of the Lord had not yet started because two events within the day of the Lord that would signal its presence—the apostasy and the revealing of the man of lawlessness—had not taken place. The point is not that these two events happen before the day of the Lord, but happen during it, signaling its presence.”

Added Note on “Day of Christ:” Some Greek texts read “day of the Lord” rather than “day of Christ” (2 Thess. 2:2) but in either case, this “day” refers to the time when Christ will directly intervene in human affairs by bringing destruction upon the world. The expression “day of Christ” (Christos) is found in the Majority of Greek manuscripts while the reading “day of Lord” is found as a variant reading in an older manuscript (Codex Vaticanus). In 1 Thessalonians 5:2 Paul called the Tribulation Period by the name “day of the Lord” (kurios).

If we follow the Majority Greek text reading in 2 Thessalonians 2:3, we can conclude that Paul’s usage of the “day of Christ” and “day of the Lord” can sometimes be used interchangeably. This is because both expressions are looking ahead to the time of God’s wrath and judgment over the earth. Actually, whether it is Christ’s day or the Lord’s Day makes little difference from a prophetic standpoint since the intent is to teach that this coming period of judgment flows forth from God, and more specifically from Christ, since He unleashes the judgments upon the tribulation earth (Rev. 5-6).

Summary of the Events

- A falling away or spiritual apostasy must take place during the Tribulation Period (2 Thess. 2:3) which culminates in the worship of Antichrist. It will consist of unsaved people openly and defiantly rejecting God and the truth by worshipping Antichrist, who will place himself, and also an identical statue of himself, in the rebuilt Jewish temple, making the bold claim that he is the only true God that has ever existed (2 Thess. 2:4; Rev. 13:15-18).
- This religious apostasy can only occur when Antichrist who is the instigator of this specific apostasy is revealed (his identity is brought out into the light) during the Tribulation Period (2 Thess. 2:3, 8), fulfilling prophecies related to his End Time movements and wickedness upon the earth. The primary

revelation of the man of sin occurs in conjunction with the apostasy that he is promoting which is the deification of himself as God (Matt. 24:15).

- But this specific religious apostasy and revelation of the Antichrist cannot happen until the Restrainer (Holy Spirit) is taken out of the way (2 Thess. 2:6-7) and sets the stage for the End Time apostasy to occur. The sign that the Tribulation Period has come upon the earth is the breakout of unprecedented evil, the rejecting of truth, which results in the worship of Antichrist. The removal of the restraining influence of the Holy Spirit is also an indication of the removal of the Church prior to the Tribulation Period through which the Spirit works to restrain evil. You cannot have the removal of one without the other. When the Holy Spirit's influence is removed it's a clear indication that the Church is removed for the Holy Spirit works through the Church to restrain evil on earth.

In conclusion, the Tribulation Period (Day of Christ/Lord) was not "at hand" or present and in progress on the earth (2 Thess. 2:2) since none of the events associated with this specific time period had occurred. Therefore, Paul proves pretribulationism is true because of the unfulfilled events of the Tribulation Period related to the apostasy, Antichrist, and the removal of all ethical restraints. However, he alludes to the fact that the Church will be removed at the same time the restraining influence of the Holy Spirit is "taken out of the way" (2 Thess. 2:7), since the Church is the vessel through which He restrains evil and sin, holding back or keeping Satan's End Time agenda from overtaking the earth.

For a thorough 71-page study of these verses and why "the departure" does not refer to the Rapture, see the author's study: ["The Meaning of Departure in 2 Thessalonians 2:3"](#) (Religious Apostasy, Revelation of Antichrist, and Removal of the Restrainer).