

THE COMING TRIBULATION

TEXT: II THESS. 2:12

INTRODUCTION:

1. During the apostle Paul's short stay in Thessalonica, he taught the Christians there many details concerning Bible prophecy (cf. 2:5).
2. However, some had not fully comprehended all that Paul taught, and some were confused and troubled (2:2).
3. Some Christians mistakenly believed that the Day of the Lord (I Thessalonians 5:2) had already begun, and the persecutions (1:4) they were facing were part of the tribulation period.
4. Apparently a false report or forged letter ("by letter" – 2:2) was being circulated. This report claimed, "that the day of Christ is at hand" (2:2).
5. This Scripture reminds us that even while Paul was still alive, heretics were already disseminating false doctrines through forged letters.
6. Some newer Bible translations say "the day of the Lord" instead of "day of Christ" (II Thessalonians 2:2), but there is no valid reason for changing the King James Version since the correct Greek text says "the day of Christ."
7. The expression "day of Christ" is found three times in Scripture. In Philippians 1:10 and 2:16, "the day of Christ" refers to the rapture of the church and the judgment seat of Christ.
8. Here in II Thessalonians 2:2 it probably means the same thing. The believers in Thessalonica were "shaken" and "troubled" because they thought they had missed the rapture, and the tribulation had begun.

I. THERE WILL COME A "FALLING AWAY" (2:3)

1. This "falling away" refers to the end-time apostasy. There has always been apostasy, but it will get worse as we head toward the second coming of Christ.
2. Paul wrote in II Timothy 3, "This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come...But evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived" (II Tim. 3:1, 13).
3. Deception is a big part of apostasy. In Matthew 24:3, our Lord's disciples asked Him, "Tell us, when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?"

4. "And Jesus answered and said unto them, Take heed that no man deceive you. For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many...And many false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many" (24:4, 5, 11). Cf. II Thess. 2:9 -- "signs and lying wonders."
5. Revelation 13 describes how the whole world will be deceived by the antichrist. Revelation 13:8 says, "And all that dwell upon the earth shall worship him, whose names are not written in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world."
6. The final stage of apostate Christendom will develop into the worldwide harlot church described in Revelation 17.

II. THE "MAN OF SIN" IS THE ANTICHRIST (vss. 3, 4, 8, 9).

1. The word "antichrist" is only found four times in the Bible (I John 2:18, 22; 4:3; II John 7), but he is described by other terms.
2. Throughout the book of Revelation he is referred to as "the beast."
3. The "little horn" (Dan. 7:8, 24-26).
4. A king of fierce countenance (Dan. 8:23-25).
5. The prince who is to come (Dan. 9:26).
6. The willful king (Dan. 11:36-45).
7. The idol shepherd (Zech. 11:17).
8. The one who comes in his own name (John 5:43).
9. The beast that ascendeth out of the bottomless pit (Rev. 11:7; cf. Rev. 13—17).
10. The prefix *anti* can mean "in the place of" or "instead of" as well as "against." Therefore, the pope is an antichrist because he claims to be the "vicar of Christ."
11. The antichrist will demand to be worshipped (II Thess. 2:4). This will be half way through the tribulation period (cf. Dan. 9:27; Matt. 24:15; Rev. 13:4).
12. The antichrist will get his power from Satan (II Thess. 2:9).
13. Revelation 13:2 says, "The dragon gave him his power, and his seat, and great authority."
14. The antichrist will deceive the multitudes with "signs and lying wonders" (II Thess. 2:9).
15. Our Lord said in Matthew 24:24, "For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect" (cf. Rev. 13:13-15).

16. Miracles and signs and wonders indicate supernatural power, but not necessarily divine power. It could very well be satanic power (cf. Ex. 7:7-12).

III. THE “RESTRAINER” (2:5-7)

1. The mystery of iniquity is presently being restrained (2:7). The word "letteth" (2:7) has changed its meaning since the King James Version was translated 400 years ago.
2. Then the word meant to hold back, to restrain, to hinder (Scofield margin). Today it means just the opposite.
3. The word “withholdeth” (2:6) means “restrains.” “Letteth” means “hinder” (2:6, 7). The idea is: For the mystery of iniquity is already working; only He who now is restraining it will continue to restrain until He is taken out of the way.
4. This restrainer is holding back “the mystery of iniquity” (2:7), i.e., the development of the antichrist philosophy, which has been gradually spreading, and brainwashing people into a confused and deluded state of mind.
5. In I Timothy 3:16, Paul says, "And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh."
6. In direct antithesis to this mystery of godliness is the "mystery of iniquity" (II Thess. 2:7) culminating in the coming of the antichrist (cf. 2:3-12).
7. The mystery of iniquity was already at work when Paul wrote this epistle to the church at Thessalonica (2:7).
8. Clarence Larkin said, "The 'Mystery of Godliness' is God manifest in the flesh, and the 'Mystery of Iniquity' is Satan manifest in the flesh" (*Dispensational Truth*).
9. The “mystery of iniquity” has taken over the educational system in America, the news and entertainment outlets, the courts, and even most of the churches.
10. An example: all over the USA, liberal judges are declaring there is a "constitutional right" for sodomites to get "married."
11. The “mystery of iniquity” (2:7) will finally culminate in the coming tribulation when people will bow down and worship the dragon (Satan) and the beast (Rev. 13:4).
12. People are being programmed for this through television, the Internet, rock music, the public school system, etc.

13. The devil hates strong soulwinning churches, Christian schools, homeschooling, etc. because this hinders “the mystery of iniquity” (2:7) from working.
14. But when the restrainer will “be taken out of the way” (2:7), then the floodgates of filth and wickedness will be poured out over this world.
15. “And then shall that Wicked (the antichrist) be revealed” (2:8).
16. There are various views regarding the identity of the restrainer. In verse 6, the restrainer (“what”) is neuter; but in verse 7 “he” and “his” (2:6, 7) are masculine, indicating the restrainer is a person.
17. Some teach the restrainer is human government. But human government will not be removed during the tribulation. In fact, the antichrist will use human government to control the world and kill his opponents (Rev. 13:16-18; 14:9-11; 20:4).
18. The restrainer has to be someone strong enough to hold back the power of Satan – some one stronger than Satan. Only God is stronger than Satan; therefore the restrainer is God. That is why the personal pronoun "he" is used (2:7).
19. The restrainer is the Holy Spirit. Only the Holy Spirit is powerful enough to restrain Satan and his evil spirits.
20. Isaiah 59:19 says, "When the enemy shall come in like a flood, the Spirit of the LORD shall lift up a standard against him."
21. From the book of Genesis all the way through to the book of Revelation we see the enemy coming in like a flood, and we see the Holy Spirit restraining sin.
22. In Genesis 6:3, the LORD said, "My spirit shall not always strive with man." The Holy Spirit was restraining sin back in the days before the flood. But God's patience wore out and instead of striving with man, God judged man's sin by sending the flood. God said, "My spirit shall not always strive with man."
23. The Holy Spirit indwells all born again believers. First Corinthians 6:19 says, "Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you?"
24. It is the Holy Spirit, indwelling Christians, that is restraining evil today. He reproves the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: (John 16:8).
25. Acts 2 tells us that the Holy Spirit came down in great power on the day of Pentecost. And just as He came on Pentecost, He will "be taken out of the way" (2:7) when all believers will be removed at the rapture.

26. The removal of both the Holy Spirit and the Bible-preaching churches from all over the world will release the world to sin like never before.
27. Today the presence of genuine believers in the world exerts a great influence upon this wicked, sin-loving world.
28. But things will change quickly after the rapture, and evil will be manifested beyond anything known in human history.

CONCLUSION:

1. Some Christians have asked how can the Holy Spirit be removed, if the Holy Spirit is God, and God is omnipresent.
2. The Holy Spirit will leave the world in the same sense in which He came on the day of Pentecost -- as the abiding Indweller of the church and of every genuine believer.
3. When we say the Holy Spirit will be removed at the rapture, we are not saying that God will cease to work in the world during the tribulation.