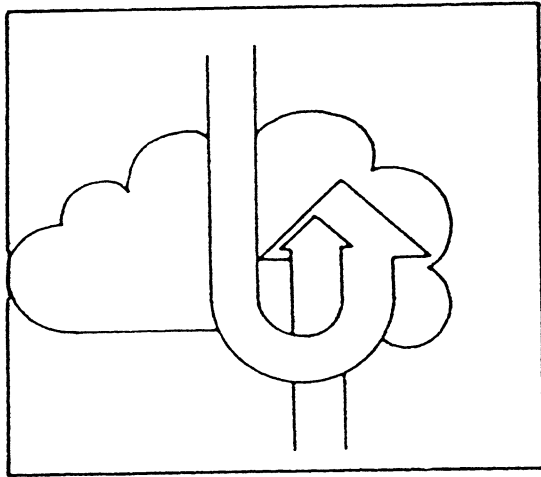


The Rapture in the Thessalonian Epistles

Grammatical and Theological Considerations



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INTRODUCTION

The ministry of the Apostle Paul to the Thessalonians is remarkable in many particulars. According to Acts 17:1-10, Paul accompanied by Silas and Timothy had ministered in Thessalonica "three sabbath days" involving at least fifteen days and at the most twenty-seven days. In this brief period of time their ministry had been so effective that a small group of believers was formed. Paul had instructed them in the rudiments of the Christian faith, including the doctrine of the first coming of Christ as the promised Messiah and Savior, and the doctrine of the second coming of Christ attended by the resurrection of the dead, the rapture of the living, then finally the revelation of Christ and his reign. Paul left the Thessalonians because of persecution. However, he hoped to return to them soon. Because he was unable to do so, he wrote I Thessalonians to explain his absence. Further, he explains the nature of the return of the Lord, which had been troubling these believers, and discusses the matter of their suffering. This epistle was probably the first one that Paul wrote. It was written in the year A. D. 52. The second epistle was written soon after the first, likewise from Corinth. Its chief object was to correct an erroneous notion which had begun to prevail among the Christians at Thessalonica, that the appearance of the Savior and the end

of the world were at hand, as well as to protest against some practical misapplications of the belief.

Thus, the coming of the Lord is one of the central themes of the Thessalonian epistles. It is evident that Paul had taught these believers much concerning these truths, although his stay in this city had been brief. This fact accentuates the importance of this doctrine. And its relevance is also readily seen. As the test of orthodoxy is what one believes about the first coming of Christ, so the test of spirituality is: What do you believe about the second coming of Christ? A church that believes in the imminent personal return of the Lord will be on fire for God. It is the purpose of this paper to delineate this grand theme of the personal return of Christ for his own, as it is found in the pages of these two epistles.

THE RAPTURE A PROMISE TO BELIEVERS

I. THESS. 1:8-10

The Commendation of Paul

In the first portion of this epistle, the Apostle expresses his gratitude and joy on account of the manner in which the Thessalonians had received the gospel, and for their fidelity and constancy in the midst of persecutions and afflictions; vindicates the conduct of himself and his fellow-laborers in the preaching of the gospel, and declares his affectionate concern for their welfare.

The believers' work of faith, labor of love, and patience of hope (v. 3) became evident to all the regions round about them. In their work of faith they had turned to God; in their labor of love they served God despite the persecutions; and in their patience of hope they awaited the return of Christ (vvs. 9-10).

In v. 8 their testimony is seen to be still sounding forth, as stressed by the perfect tense. The result of their complete change of life continue to influence the pagan society round about them. Their testimony is not only limited to Macedonia or Achaia, but extends to the whole known world, "in every place." The faith of the Thessalonians is so universally spoken of that the Apostle himself has no need to

say anything about it.

The γὰρ of v. 9 is explanatory. Anybody, both Christian and heathen, could tell that the Thessalonians had been converted, therefore Paul needed not say a word to anyone about them. The people of Macedonia and Achaia (where Paul was as he wrote the letter) speak continually of the example of these believers.

The Confirmation of Paul

In v. 10 Paul confirms their hope in the personal return of Christ: "And to constantly wait for his Son out from within the heavens, whom he raised up from among the dead, Jesus, the one who is delivering us out of the coming wrath."

The Character of the Hope

The Christian knows that the Lord Jesus is coming again because it is a precious promise. The present infinitive of ἀναπερω speaks of the daily watchfulness and expectation. A. T. Robertson rightly remarks that "the hope of the second coming of Christ was real and powerful with Paul as it should be with us He alludes to this hope at the close of each chapter in this epistle."¹

¹A. T. Robertson, Word Pictures in the New Testament (Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman Press), IV, 14.

The Content of the Hope

The content of their hope was for the Son who would appear from heaven, It would be the bridegroom returning to receive his bride. It would be Christ the head returning to be joined to his body, the church.

The Center of the Hope

Paul confirms in v. 10b that Jesus would deliver the believer from the wrath to come. There are two views in respect to this "wrath to come." (1) Some hold that it has reference to the Great White Throne, or the second death, or eternal damnation. However, the context speaks of the result of the resurrection of Christ. The believer has been delivered from the above judgments by the death of Christ. (2) The reference is no doubt to a deliverance from the tribulation period, "the day of wrath," because this deliverance depends on the resurrection and return of Christ.

The preposition ἀπο means "away," "away from," and the ablative case, the case of separation, gives the statement the meaning that we are separated from the coming wrath. ἡ ὀργή, "the wrath" points to a particular wrath of God. It is the holy anger of God poured out upon the wicked during the great tribulation. This same deliverance of wrath is mentioned in I Thessalonians 5:9 and Revelation 3:10 clearly establishes the fact that the believer will not only be kept

from the wrath, but he will be kept from the very time, "the hour" of temptation. When God's displeasure is unleashed upon the evildoers, the believer will be preserved and separated from this judgment, because the Lord would rapture his own first. This is the implied teaching of 1:10, further developed in the epistle.

THE RAPTURE A PAROUSIA FOR BELIEVERS

I. THESS. 2:19; 3:13

The two passages above refer to the παρουσία of Christ. They will illustrate that the term is non-technical in usage. Its meaning depends on the context. Three New Testament words are used to describe the coming of the Lord. They are παρουσία, ἀποκάλυψις, and ἐπιφάνεια. The context always determines their meaning. The former word means "presence," occurs 24 times, 16 of which it refers to our Lord's return. In 8 out of 16 it is used in connection with the coming of the Lord in judgment (Matth. 24:3, 27, 37, 39; I Thess. 5:13; II Thess. 2:8; II Pet. 1:16; 3:4), while the remaining 8 describe that aspect of his return connected with rewards, commonly called the rapture (I. Cor. 15:23; I Thess. 2:19; 4:15; 5:23; II Thess. 2:1; James 5:7, 8; I John 2:28).

The word παρουσία comes from παρα and ἔιμι -- "along side of" "to be", thus literally, "to be alongside of one," hence "to be by," "to be at hand," "to have arrived." The word was used of the arrival of a king or ruler who expected to receive his "crown of coming."¹ The Thessalonians, Paul says

¹ John Lineberry, Vital Word Studies in I Thessalonians (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1960), p. 65.

in 2:20, will be his crown, glory, joy when Jesus comes. The grammatical structure of v. 19 betrays the emotional intensity of Paul. The latter part of v. 19 is best taken as a parenthesis. Paul is looking forward to the arrival of Christ who will reward the faithful servants. The believer will be at hand at that time. This is an entirely different event in view in 3:13, some say. One view holds this to have reference to (1) the revelation of Jesus Christ as he appears with the saints and angels to judge the world at the end of the tribulation. But although it is possible that this may refer to this event, it can also be taken to refer to (2) the rapture. The context (4:13-18) speaks of the rapture. Also, the Church is exhorted to look for the rapture instead of the revelation, and "all his saints" seems to be defined by 4:14, 15, the "all" referring to the sleeping saints.

These two verses contribute to the understanding of the rapture in that they clearly teach that the believers' part in the rapture does not depend on his readiness. Rather, the Thessalonian Christians were well instructed that they should be ready, because the rapture was imminent, and that this anticipation should be an incentive for holy living and faithful witness.

THE RAPTURE A PROBLEM TO BELIEVERS

I. THESS. 4:13-18

The Problem

Timothy, after ministering to the Thessalonians, came back to Paul with good tidings. But he also brought back some questions which were beyond his understanding. These questions which troubled the Thessalonian believers are answered by the apostle in this section. One of the most important questions concerned the relationship of the translation of the living church to the resurrection of Christians who had died. It seems apparent that this issue had not been raised while Paul was with them. Their question was whether those believers who had died since Paul's departure, would be raised at the same time the living church was raptured, or whether this resurrection would take place at some later time. They had been filled with confusion and dismay at the thought of their departed fellow-believers being robbed of their part in Christ's return through the hand of death. Paul instructs these believers that they sorrow not because the departed believers shall share in the rapture. That this is so is amplified by the apostle with a preview, a promise, and a picture of the rapture.

The Preview

Whenever Paul uses the phrase, "I would not have you be ignorant, brethren," one can always be sure that the brethren were ignorant. And so in v. 13. But they needn't have been. Neither need they sorrow, because they have a preview of what the resurrection will be like.

"Them that sleep" in v. 13 refers to dead believers. The Lord used the figure of sleep to describe death for the saved person (John 11:11). The present participle can either mean "those that are lying asleep" or "those who fall asleep from time to time." At any rate, the metaphor suggests that a sleeping person will awake at some future time. As sleep is temporary, so death is only temporary. Therefore, there is no need for sorrow. Sorrow characterizes the heathen, comfort and anticipation the Christian.

In v. 14 the resurrection of Christ is said to be a preview of the believer's resurrection. Likewise, the truth of the Lord's return is tied in with the indispensable essentials of the faith, namely, that Jesus died and rose again. The εἰ γὰρ πιστεύομεν is not a conditional, hypothetical case, because the particle εἰ refers to a fulfilled condition. The translation is thus, "For in view of the fact that we believe." "Them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him," refers to the fact that when Christ returns, he will be accompanied by the dead in Christ, whose souls and spirits

are with the Lord, while their body rests in the tomb. These will be rejoined at his coming.

The Promise

To assure the Thessalonian believers that their departed loved ones will not be at a disadvantage when Christ returns, he reminds them that the promise of Christ is clear, that the dead shall precede the living. This promise could either be an unrecorded saying of Christ (cf. Acts 20:35) or it may have come to Paul by direct revelation.

The word παρουσία in this v. 15 is most appropriate. In the Greek papyri this word is found with a semi-technical sense in that it is employed of the arrival of a royal visitor to a certain district, and includes the thought of the preparation occasioned by the visit. The term stresses the preparedness of the King's subjects as they anticipate the Savior's return.

Paul includes himself in the living ones at the time of the rapture. The ἡμεῖς in "we which are alive" is emphatic. It illustrates that Paul anticipated the imminent return of Christ during his lifetime. The time of it was unknown; no intervening prophetic events need to transpire. It could take place at any moment.

The latter part of the verse contains an emphatic double negative: "we shall positively not precede those who

have fallen asleep." This was the comfort the Thessalonians were waiting for. We shall not attain to the fellowship of Christ sooner than the dead in Christ, nor have precedence in blessedness.

The Picture

Paul now supplies the details of what will happen when the Lord returns.

A Return

We are introduced by the word "for" in v. 16 to a more detailed statement of this precious promise. One is immediately impressed with the emphatic position of the words αυτος ὁ κυριος -- "the Lord himself." The terminology furnishes indisputable proof that our Lord's return will be personal, and likewise suggests the thought that when he comes for his own, he will do so without any attendant, just as Isaac alone came forth to meet Rebekah when she came to be his wife. There will be no ethereal phantom, nor even a delegated representative, but the Lord himself. When he comes it will be with the symbols of monarchial majesty. The record reveals that three things accompany his return: (1) a shout, (2) a voice, (3) a trumpet.

A shout.--The Greek word translated "shout"--κελευσ-
ματι, is used of the huntsman calling his dogs, of a chariot-driver speaking to his steed, and of the cry of the captain

to the rowers in a vessel.¹ This signal-shout apparently indicates that all the Lord's own will hear and understand it, though there seems no reason for believing that this will be true of the unbelieving world. It may be that unbelievers will hear the signal-shout, but, like those described in John 12:28, 29, they will not understand the significance.

A voice.--The ἐν φωνῇ ἀρχαγγέλου will herald the Lord's return. The greek word for "archangel" occurs in only one other place (cf. Jude 9), and while attempts have been made to identify the archangel as the Lord Jesus Christ, it appears from Jude 9 that this cannot be for two reasons: (1) the archangel is specifically called Michael, and (2) Satan is represented as being originally higher than Michael. It is significant that the definite article is omitted before either "voice" or "archangel". This places emphasis on the quality of the voice rather than on the person connected with it, so that discussion concerning the person of the archangel is beside the point here. The chief of the angelic hierarchy will carry out the will of God. Angels have the special part in God's work, especially towards the saints.

A trumpet.--A third accompanying feature of the Lord's return is that of "the trumpet of God." As Ellicott points

¹ C. Ellicott, Commentary on the Epistles to the Thessalonians (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1957), pp. 63-64.

out, the genetive is best regarded as possessive,¹ and this, together with the fact that the definite article is omitted, indicates that it is such a trumpet as is employed in God's service. The trumpet was frequently associated with the Old Testament theophanies (e.g., Exod. 19:16, 19; cf. Heb. 12:19), so that it is not surprising that we should meet with it here on this climactic event. As in the Old Testament the trumpet was used to summon to battle and to summon to worship, so here the command will be, "Come and worship!" The liberated saints will be called to worship.²

Continuing the vivid discription of this event, Paul indicates that the dead in Christ shall rise first. The phrase οἱ νεκροὶ ἐν Χριστῷ undoubtedly refers to the sleeping ones of v. 13, though it certainly embraces all such throughout the church age. The monster of death cannot break the bond that binds us to the Lord. The despairing grief, so evident at Thessalonica, is completely unfounded.

This resurrection is not a select resurrection, even as the rapture is not a select rapture. The resurrection will include all the dead in Christ; it is not a resurrection of rewards but part of God's gift.

¹Ibid., p. 64.

²J. Dwight Pentecost, Prophecy for Today (Grand Rapids, Mich.: 1964), p. 30.

A Rapture

V. 17 points out the immediacy of the event with ἐπιτα--"then" and this thought is further accentuated by ἄμα--"at the same time"--"we, the living, who are remaining, shall be snatched away." I Corinthians 15:42-44, 52-54 tells of the specific changes which the living and dead will undergo at that moment.

The word ἁρπάγησθε--"shall be caught up," means literally, "to take away by force" as a wild beast carries off its prey. The word is used 13 times in the N. T., and is used, for example, of one being pulled out of the fire (Jude 23); of Satan catching away the seed (Matt. 13:19); of Philip being caught away (Acts 8:39); and of Paul being caught up to paradise (II Cor. 12:2). The Lord's redeemed will be gathered to him, irrespective of every obstacle and the impeding law of gravitation.

This passage further indicates that the living, "together with them" (the dead), will be snatched away. It will be "together," at the same time and in the same manner. The "with them" undoubtedly implies a re-union and a recognition. The ἐν is locative and points to the clouds of heaven as the sphere. We shall meet the Lord in the atmospheric heaven and after his return enjoy eternal union and communion with him. Though not stated implicitly, it is plain that we will also be with our loved ones in Christ forever.

A Reassurance

The verb παράκαλεω in v. 18 is in the present imperative. They are commanded to comfort continually. The pronoun is reciprocal, meaning that each one of them was to receive the spiritual encouragement from the other in talking about the return of the Lord. The truth of the rapture is a great consolation and expectation to the believer. Were the church to go through the tribulation, the exhortation might well be in that case: "Therefore scare ye one another with these words." But a deliverance from the wrath, a union with the departed believers, and an eternal communion with Christ are the basis of a comforting hope.

The passage above teaches clearly why the Thessalonians need not sorrow. The return of the Lord will effect a reunion of the body with the soul and spirit, thus making man complete again. Living believers will be united with those who have departed this life. And all believers will be reunited in visible manifestation with the risen and ascended Lord.

THE RAPTURE A PRECEDENT TO THE DAY OF THE LORD

I. THESS. 5:1-11

The Chronology of the Rapture 1-2

Immediately following the passage of the rapture of the church there follows a discussion of the question when these end events will be fulfilled. The exact time of the rapture cannot be established chronologically since it is not a subject of revelation. But by examining the relationship between the rapture and revelation certain facts become evident.

The Thessalonians were duly instructed by the Apostle Paul and his associates concerning the prophetic timetable of God. They knew that the rapture of the saints was next on God's program, followed immediately by the day of the Lord, which is that extended period after the rapture, beginning with the covenant of the beast (Dan. 9). It extends through the Millennial reign of Christ. Though some of its major events would not take place immediately, the period would extend from the rapture. Concerning the relationship of the rapture and the day of the Lord, Dr. Walvoord has written:

The coming of the Day of the Lord, therefore, is coincident with the rapture itself and for this reason the apostle discusses its arrival as if it were one and the same as the rapture of the church itself. Just as the Day of the Lord would come as a thief, so also the rapture. Though expected by those who believe in the doctrine of the rapture, it would come upon the earth in their state

of total unpreparedness.¹

The day of the Lord comes "even as a thief in the night" because it will come suddenly, unexpectedly, as a prowling thief in the night, since the unregenerate, sleeping world is blinded through the deceitfulness of sin and Satan (II Cor. 4:4; I John 5:19), to the program of God.

The Contrast With the Rapture 3-8

The rapture is timeless and signless; the day of the Lord is characterized by delusion and destruction. The second advent of Christ will be preceded by all the signs of the tribulation. When false security in the heart and false promises upon the lips hold men in their grip, at that very moment, judgment falls on the ungodly. As the rapture will deliver the godly; the day of the Lord will destroy the ungodly. The ὄλεθρος does not mean the destruction of being nor the putting an end to the existence of a person or thing, but its ruin so far as the purpose of its existence is concerned. In judgment the sinner suffers endless loss.

As the rapture will bring pleasure and peace, the day of the Lord will bring pain as of childbirth, "and the comparison involves inevitable certainty, suddenness, and intense pain."²

¹John F. Walvoord, The Church in Prophecy (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1964), p. 87.

²C. C. Ryrie, First and Second Thessalonians (Chicago: Moody Press, 1959), p. 70.

In striking contrast to the miserable plight of the wicked, the Christian will escape the judgment day of the Lord, in view of the fact that he is not in darkness (v. 5). The sufferings of the Thessalonian Christians were not part of the day of the Lord. Paul writes that they "are not in darkness, that that day (of the Lord)" should overtake them. Post-tribulationists would take the term "not in darkness" as being synonymous with "not ignorant", but the contrast here is between: darkness--unsaved--Day of the Lord, and light--saved--rapture. The believer has no part in this judgment.

Paul then calls upon the believers to conduct themselves in a manner commensurate with their privileges and position in Christ. They are not to sleep as the others but to watch. It is most important to note that the apostle does not in any wise indicate that they will enter the day of the Lord with its judgments upon the world. Nor does the apostle hold before them the signs which would normally be included in a revelation concerning Christ's coming to establish his kingdom. They are exhorted to watch for the coming of the Lord himself and not for preceding signs. The idea thus is that the coming of the Lord is imminent and an event to be expected at any time.

The helmet of salvation's hope in v. 8 is that of the imminent return of Christ to rapture the church. The

Christian can expect future deliverance.

The Call to Watchfulness 9-11

Verse 9 is a summary of what the apostle has been discussing in the preceding verses of this chapter: "For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation." In Revelation 6:17 the tribulation is described as a day of wrath, and the teaching is unmistakable that the church will have no part in this day. It is not a protection in the wrath but rather, this is not our appointment. Rather, the destiny of believers is to obtain σωτηριαν--"deliverance," not only from the guilt of sin or the present evil world, but that deliverance from the time of tribulation which will befall the Christ-rejecting earth (Rev. 3:10). How this will be accomplished has been described in 4:13-18.

The basis of this deliverance, as described in v. 10, is not the meritorious behavior of believers but the substitutionary death of Christ. The holy purpose of the Lord's redeeming death is whether we are alive or dead at Christ's appearing, we shall live with him in glory (Rom. 14:8). The expectation of the believer is therefore not wrath (v. 9) but the revelation of the Son from heaven.(v. 10).

As at the close of ch. 4, so here after the close of the discussion, the Thessalonians are exhorted to comfort one another and to build up one another, because the deliverance is sure. On the basis of the text, it cannot be otherwise.

THE RAPTURE AND THE PERSECUTION OF THE DAY OF THE LORD

II THESS. 1:3-10

Persistence Despite Persecution 3-6

Persecution seemed to be especially severe for the new believers in Thessalonica. Some of the Christians seemed to be asking the question, Why? Paul starts his letter with a strong commendation. They had persisted in their persecution as their faith and love continued to grow. Their constancy in trial was a testimony to all the other churches as well. These tribulations and persecutions were still continuing, for the word ἀνέχεσθε --"bearing" is in the present tense. Paul goes on to say that their trial is but for a season. Glory always follows suffering. For the unbelieving world, their sin and seeming well-being is followed by judgment. The faith working within the believers is a guarantee that God will keep his promise to deliver them and grant them a place in the kingdom.

Peace Despite Tribulation 7-8

In verse 6 Paul had stated the God will recompense affliction to the persecuters. In this section he stresses the blessed fact that God will give rest to the persecuted. This judgment of the unbelievers, so graphically described in these two verses, will take place at the second advent. The rest spoken of is therefore not that which comes to

believers at the rapture. While the believers are raptured before, they do not witness judgment of their enemies until the revelation of Christ, at which time they enter into the rest. The persecuters will reap that which they have sown and will receive everlasting destruction. It is eternal separation from the presence of God.

Punishment Versus Glorification 9-10

The coming of Christ will bring with it two things about which these believers needed to be instructed: (1) retribution upon the evildoers and (2) glorification of Christ. Vengeance on those who have not obeyed the gospel by receiving the Savior is meted out at his coming. But more than that. The Lord will be glorified in his saints. The ἐν¹ is a locative of sphere. The believers are the sphere in which Christ will find his glory at the revelation.¹ They themselves will have been already glorified. Their completely changed lives will draw attention to their Lord. These instructions are given to be an encouragement for the believers to continue steadfastly.

¹Robertson, p. 44.

THE RAPTURE AND THE PRESENCE OF THE SPIRIT

II THESS. 2:1-17

Is the Day of the Lord Present?

Because of their persecutions, some of the Thessalonians had begun to wonder whether they were ~~not~~ already in the day of the Lord, the predicted time of divine judgment. Someone had tampered with Paul's doctrine (v. 3), professing to represent Paul. Thus there continued to be this confusion concerning the day of the Lord. But Paul shows that this teaching that they are already in the day of the Lord is false and groundless. He hastens to assure them that they are not in this period, and he gives them definite signs, which could not possibly occur while the church is still on earth.

The ἐνεστίν in v. 2 means "present" not "imminent." The day of the Lord is indeed imminent, but it was not yet present, despite the fact that the persecutions and the false teachers seemed to have pointed in that direction.

What Is the Relation of the Day of the Lord to the Man of Sin?

Paul gives two proofs that they are not in the day of the Lord. (1) There must first be a falling away. The word ἄποστασία (v. 3) may either refer to a departure from

the faith or a departure of the saints from the earth, as already mentioned in verse 1, but this is of little consequence. However, the likely interpretation is that it speaks of the aggressive and positive falling away from and rebellion against God. It is religious and spiritual defection.¹

There will also first have to be (2) the revelation of the man of sin, or the lawless one (v. 3b), further described in Revelation 13. According to v. 5, Paul had already taught them these things, to expect just what Daniel had prophesied concerning this person, who is the personification of evil and the culmination of the opposition to God. Daniel relates (ch. 9) that the day of the Lord cannot begin till after this willful King has made a covenant with the people of Israel. This signing of the covenant will therefore signal the start of the tribulation period.

What Is the Relation of the Day of the Lord
to the Restrainer?

In v. 6 there is a third reason why they are not in the day of the Lord. There is something which holds back the revelation of this man of sin. Until the obstacle is removed, the day of the Lord cannot begin.

¹ Ellicott, p. 108.

Various views have been held as to the identity of this restrainer. Human government, law, the visible church will not explain this, for these will continue in a measure after the manifestation of the lawless one.¹ Dr. Ryrie writes concerning this restrainer:

Whoever the restrainer is, He must be more powerful than Satan, who empowers the man of sin. Only a person of the Godhead would so qualify, and since each and all of the persons of the Godhead indwell the believer (Eph. 4:6; Gal. 2:20; I. Cor. 6:19), the removal of the restrainer requires the removal of believers whom He indwells. Thus the rapture of the Church must precede this tribulation period when the man of sin holds sway.²

The most natural explanation of the taking away of the restrainer is to identify this particular action with the time when Christ will come to take out his church. The Spirit will be taken out of the world, and this means the reversal of Pentecost.

What Is the Relation of the Day of the Lord
to the Unbelievers?

Unbelievers will be deceived by the man of sin. This is to be a judgment from God. Those who are deceived had opportunity to receive Christ. They will be hardened so that they will believe "the lie," i.e., that this man of sin is the Messiah who fulfills the covenants. Their end is damnation.

¹ J. Dwight Pentecost, Things to Come (Findlay, Ohio: Dunham Publishing Co., 1961), p. 205.

² C. C. Ryrie, Biblical Theology of the New Testament (Chicago: Moody Press, 1959), p. 216.

CONCLUSION

The coming of the Lord is one of the central themes of the Thessalonian epistles. The return of Christ for his saints is promised to the believers (I Thess. 1:10), it is held forth as the hope of all believers (I Thess. 2:19), and it is marked as the goal of holiness (I Thess. 3:13). Paul carefully describes the events accompanying the rapture (I Thess. 4:13-18) and relates it chronologically to the Day of the Lord (I Thess. 5:1-12). In II Thessalonians too the rapture is clearly taught, especially so in ch. 2, where three good reasons are given why the Day of the Lord will not start until the body of Christ has been removed: (1) the apostasy must come, (2) the man of sin must first be revealed, and (3) the indwelling Spirit will be taken away first. The tribulation therefore cannot come until Christ comes and takes his church home to glory.

It may be at morn, when the day is awaking,
When sunlight thro' darkness and shadow is breaking,
That Jesus will come in the fullness of glory,
To receive from the world "His own."

It may be at mid-day, it may be at twilight,
It may be, perchance, that the blackness of midnight
Will burst into light in the blaze of His glory,
When Jesus receives "His own."

O Lord Jesus, how long, how long
Ere we shout the glad song,
Christ returneth! Hallelujah!
Hallelujah! Amen, Hallelujah, Amen.

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