

## **A Commentary on II Thessalonians 2:2, 3**

Scripture tells us that the bodies of all saved souls who are in Christ will at some point in the future be removed from the earth and taken to heaven. Bodies already dead, and thus separated from their soul/spirits will be revived, made eternally incorruptible, and returned to the individual soul/spirits that had originally dwelled in them. The bodies of all redeemed souls/spirits yet living at that time will also be made incorruptible, and along with the indwelling soul/spirits will ascent to heaven. By English translation, this is known as the Rapture. Scripture speaks of several raptures, such as that of Jesus, our first fruit of the resurrection. Then there is the rapture of the church, the rapture of the old saints, the rapture of those who die during the tribulation period, and the rapture of all who survive the millennium.

There are those who interpret this portion of Scripture as indicating that the church saints, those who died in Christ will be raptured before the tribulation, while others believe that they will be raptured after the tribulation along with the Old Testament saints and the tribulation saints. There are several comprehensive studies on both sides of this issue to be found in the writings of well respected Bible teachers. They present the scriptural evidence for their respective positions far better than this amateur could. It is evident that my belief corresponds with those who claim the pre-tribulation rapture of the church. This is because in my opinion, the scriptural evidence for the pre-trib belief is far greater. Therefore, this study will deal with but one of the many allusions to the rapture, and in particular, to only one small, but seemingly confusing reference. It's the confusion, and I believe the misinterpretations, that we'll try to deal with. We find this is 2 Thessalonians 2:1-8

*"1 Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him, 2 that ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand. 3 Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; 4 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, showing himself that he is God. 5 Remember ye not, that, when I was yet with you, I told you these things? 6 And now ye know what withholdeth that he might be revealed in his time. 7 For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way. 8 And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming:”*

What is disturbing here is that verse two speaks of “the day of Christ” while the three verses that immediately follow seem to indicate that “the day of Christ” will follow the revealing of the antichrist. As many interpret this, it seems that there is an error here, or that it also provides an argument for the post-tribulation view. Many biblical scholars of the pre-tribulation persuasion have concluded that this is a scribal error, or that it is a King James Version translation error. They believe that this verse two should read “the day of the Lord” instead of the “day of Christ”. There are also those who see no problem if one simply understands that “Christ” and “Lord” are synonymous. That however, is not always true, and I believe that it is not true in this instance.

How then can we reconcile this dilemma without concluding that Paul is saying that “the day of Christ” will follow the revealing of the Wicked one? To do this we must clearly define terms, and then apply these verses in the context not only of the 2Thessalonians, but other writings by Paul as well, especially his first letter to that assembly.

There is the question as to whether or not there is any difference here between “the day of Christ” and the “day of the Lord.” Some say they are synonymous because Christ Jesus is Lord. I believe that this is a weak and poorly reasoned answer, which in this case is simply not true, in that it is not scripturally defensible. The phrase “day of the Lord” occurs about 18 times in the Old Testament and is depicted as a time of terror, darkness, despair, wrath and judgment. It is feared and dreaded as in Zephaniah 1:14-18, where we find it most aptly described “*14 The great day of the Lord is near, it is near, and hasteth greatly, even the voice of the day of the Lord: the mighty man shall cry there bitterly. 15 That day is a day of wrath, a day of trouble and distress, a day of wasteness and*

*desolation, a day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness, 16 a day of the trumpet, and alarm against the fenced cities, and against the high towers. 17 And I will bring distress upon men, that they shall walk like blind men, because they have sinned against the Lord: and their blood shall be poured out as dust, and their flesh as the dung. 18 Neither their silver nor their gold shall be able to deliver them in the day of the Lord's wrath; but the whole land shall be devoured by the fire of his jealousy: for he shall make even a speedy riddance of all them that dwell in the land."*

The same term, "day of the Lord" only appears three times in the New Testament. We see in Acts 2:20 where it is a quote from Joel 2:28-32; in 1Thessalonians 5:2; and in 2Peter 3:10. Let us see how these New Testament writers describe the "day of the Lord."

Acts 2:20 *"the sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before that great and notable day of the Lord come:"*

1Thessalonians 5:2 *"For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night."*

2Peter 3:10 *"But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up."*

Notice that there is nothing desirable or pleasant for those who will experience "that day!" Therefore we must conclude that "the day of the Lord" refers to a time of judgment, of wrath and more specifically of that period which is that space of time beginning after the Rapture and proceeding to the end of the Tribulation. Peter's prediction also included the Great White Throne Judgment, after which this earth will be destroyed and replaced with a new heaven and earth. Now let us see what Scripture says about the "Day of Christ."

"The day of Christ" occurs only in the writings of Paul. It is found in 1Corinthians 1:8, 1Corinthians 5:5, and 2Cortithians 1:14, Philippians 1:6, 10; 2:16

1Corinthians 1:8 *“who shall also confirm you unto the end, that ye may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.”*

1Corinthians 5:5 *“to deliver such a one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.”*

2Corinthians 1:14 *“as also ye have acknowledged us in part, that we are your rejoicing, even as ye also are ours in the day of the Lord Jesus.”*

Philippians 1:6, 10; 2:16 *“6 being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ...” “10 that ye may approve things that are excellent; that ye may be sincere and without offense till the day of Christ...” “16 holding forth the word of life; that I may rejoice in the day of Christ, that I have not run in vain, neither labored in vain.”*

We find that the “day of Christ” day of our Lord as described in these verses is not one of despair, but of blessed heavenly hope (assurance); it is not a time of fear and dread, but of eager anticipation. It’s intimately associated with the Rapture, and His second coming. So how can anyone believe that these two “days of” are synonymous?

Now, to the point of this commentary. Notice that 2Thessalonians 2:2 which speaks of the day of Christ was left out of the above list of “the day of Christ” references. It is already quoted on page one. As noted, this is the reference that most scholars believe is in error, and it should have been translated as ‘the day of the Lord.’ That is because what immediately follows does describe the “day of the Lord” those terrible end times days of tribulation during which the Antichrist is revealed. As also noted above, it would seem that the reader of this reference must either conclude that it is in error, or that it refers to a post-trib or a mid-trib Rapture event. However, as noted above, “the day of Christ” as referred to in the 1Corinthians and the other references makes it evident that Paul knew that the Rapture would precede the revealing of the Antichrist. Then the revealing would in turn trigger the 3 ½ year Great Tribulation.

If we look into what we are given regarding the short history of Paul’s ministry to the Thessalonians, as well as into the other epistles, we will find additional evidence

regarding our subject premise. Some scholars date this epistle as having been written around 54 AD, and suggest that it was the first of his fourteen, which are included in Scripture. If so, then it is here that the mystery of the church and its rapture are first reported. Paul taught in the Thessalonians synagogues for three Sabbaths. This indicates that he was probably there witnessing for three weeks. He then left there and went to Corinth. Those weeks apparently were exceedingly fruitful, because in his first letter Paul exclaims in great gratitude how faithful and fruitful they were being, and that word of their great faith spread rapidly across a very large region. It's in 1Thessalonians 4:15-18 where we first find the details of the Rapture defined.

*“15 For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep. 16 For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: 17 then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. 18 Wherefore comfort one another with these words.”*

Notice the phrase “by the word of the Lord?” Where in Scripture does this “phrase” occur prior to this? It doesn't! The context in which “the Lord” is used here makes it clear that it is Jesus not the Father who is coming. Wherever the coming of the Lord is cited, it has to do with His wrath. This “comfort one another” is certainly not speaking of wrath but of pleasant anticipation! This I believe is another evidence of Paul having spent time with Jesus in the wilderness after his conversion. It is when Jesus taught him many things such as this, the mysteries of the kingdom, as well as the 7 mystery parables.

Notice his use of “we” when Paul speaks of being raptured. It's evident here, and every time that he speaks of the Rapture, that he expected that he personally would be among those so blessed. It seems evident, as noted, that Jesus had instructed Paul in many profound ways, the Mystery of the Rapture being one of them. However, it appears that he was told of it being imminent, that all believers should always be ready. This imminence of its coming of course, has been preached, and truthfully believed, to this

day. Within the theme of Paul's writings, it is also evident that he taught that there were no pre-requisites to the Rapture, and that it would remove them before the Tribulation. How then can one reconcile 2Thessalonians 2:2 with 2:3 if we interpret these as evidence of the Trib being a pre-requisite the Rapture? We can't!! The reason for Paul's second letter was that there had been some false teaching in Thessalonica from a counterfeit letter structured as if sent by Paul. This false teacher, apparently, because of the terrible persecutions that began around that time, concluded that this was in fact the Great Tribulation, and therefore they had not been included in the Rapture.

What a frightening realization this was! To have "missed" the Rapture meant that their faith was not a saving faith. Therefore many must have reasoned that they were now doomed to suffer through what appeared to them as being the Great Tribulation, and in into eternal damnation. The credibility of this ascertain seemed valid to them because, as noted, severe persecution had begun which bore all the characteristics they perceived would occur during the Great Tribulation. In verse 3 Paul is reminding them that the Tribulation could not come until the evil one had been revealed. Because this had not yet happened, what was going on could not be "The" Tribulation. It is my belief, that verse two simply says, contrary to the counterfeit letter, that "the day of Christ" was not yet at hand, period!

We find in II Thessalonians 1: 1-4 *"1 Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him, 2 that ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand. 3 Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; 4 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, showing himself that he is God."*

Here Paul had made it very clear that the Great Tribulation could not come until there is both a falling away and the man of sin (Antichrist) be revealed.

Absent the counterfeit letter, which they believed had been written by Paul, they would have remained convinced of what he told them about the Rapture and about the pre-requisite the Second Coming. It was the convincing character of the letter, and the fact they were experiencing a tribulation, that caused them to believe that Paul had indeed modified his prophesy, probably even the need for the evil one to come first. Paul caused them to dismiss the pre-requisite of the coming Antichrist

What follows will summarize and hopefully simplify my commentary on these verses:

- When Paul was with the Thessalonians the first time, he told them all about how Jesus would bless all of the redeemed. In 1Thessalonians 2:4 he told them that they would suffer some amount of tribulation, but it would not be the Great Tribulation.
- He also said that the man of sin would reveal himself to be as such before the Rapture. He told them that he would reveal himself at the very beginning of the Great Tribulation. This is confirmed by II Thessalonians 2:8 where he reminded them of this very specific pre-requisite to the Second Coming.
- Before that would happen however, Paul told them that the Lord would call them to Him, both the living and the dead in Christ Jesus. (I Thessalonians 4:15-17) Therefore, none of them would ever experience the Great Tribulation.
- Apparently the counterfeit letter informed them that the tribulation they were then experiencing was the Great Tribulation, and therefore that they had missed being included in the Rapture.
- When Paul heard of this, he sent his second letter to assure them that all was as it should be, just as he had already told them when he was with them.
- They already knew that the day of Christ would come after the Great Tribulation, on that great day when Jesus would physically descend to earth and destroy all of His enemies including the man of sin.

- The false letter apparently told them that this day of Christ was already very nearly at hand (II Thessalonians 2:2)
- Then Paul in verse 3 reminded them of what he had already taught them, that the day of Christ could not happen until the man of sin (Antichrist) had been revealed. Since this had not happened, they should not have been deceived by the false letter. Why not? Believing that it was an authentic letter from Paul, it probably seemed evident that Paul must have had second thoughts on the matter, and so they chose to believe that this second letter was a correction of his first letter.

Thus we see that there is no need to consider any possible validity to the belief that these verses are mistranslations, scribal errors or any other form of blasphemous doubt regarding the accurate preservation of God's Holy Word.