

2. The apostasy and the son of sin

June 28, 2007

I've never experienced an earthquake. From what I heard other people's comments, you feel like you are just about gonna sink right into the ground, because there is not one stable thing to hold onto.

Japanese and Southern Californians are familiar with this natural movement. Books have been written about them, movies have been made about them, but I was told that nothing can quite describe the unsettling terror of actually experiencing one.

What earthquakes are to the regions they affect, the divine judgement of the Day of the Lord will be to the whole world and far worse. Every person on earth during that time who chooses not to follow the Lord will experience the wrath of God without an exception.

Apparently the church members of Thessalonica had become confused about the timing, fearing that the Great Tribulation had already begun and they were left behind. Apostle Paul is going to settle their hearts and corrects their confused theology.

A. THE RAPTURE OF THE CHURCH

2 Thessalonians 2:1-2 Now, brethren, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, we ask you, 2 not to be soon shaken in mind or troubled, either by spirit or by word or by letter, as if from us, as though the day of Christ had come.

The purpose of Bible prophecy is not for us to make a calendar, nor to scratch our itching prophecy bones, but to build godly characters in us. Apostle Paul emphasized this fact in both of his Thessalonian letters, and our Lord warned us not to set dates for His coming since nobody knows.

But there are always silly people who want to get rich quick and famous within Christian realm and set the date of the rapture. Guess what? Thousands of people go for that dumb idea. I hate to agree with Bill Clinton, but it was right for him to say, "Suckers are born every five minute."

Paul appealed to them to "calm down" on the basis of the truth he had taught them in his first letter.

1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. 17 Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.

Before the Lord pours out His wrath against satan and his partners in crime during the Great Tribulation, Jesus will personally call out His people who are on earth – dead or live alike and take us to heaven. That is the sign of the beginning of the Great Tribulation.

Once the church is out of the world, satan and his forces will unfold their program. The Day of the Lord is the period that follows the Rapture of the church. It will be a time of Tribulation for the people on earth: Satan and his hosts will be working on earth, and God will send righteous judgments from heaven.

Liberal Christian denomination people and agnostic people argue that there is no word "rapture" found in the Bible. That is absolutely correct. However, the word "caught up" is the Greek 'harpazo', meaning "to grasp hastily, snatch up, to lift, transport." We get the word 'rapture' from the Latin Bible Vulgate 'rapturo'.

The rapture is the one of the most important events in the eschatology which mean the end-time prophecy. If you ignore the rapture, you have to ignore a good portion of the Bible and deny the power of God. In other words, anyone who ignores the rapture has no idea about the end-time prophecy.

I am sure that many of you have heard arguments about the pre-tribulation, mid-tribulation, pan-tribulation and post-tribulation theory. They all come up with very convincing arguments and Bible verses to back them up even though they are out of contexts. Calvary Chapel believes that the rapture will happen before the Great Tribulation happens and we interpret all the eschatology according to that theology.

Until now, I used other cross-reference verses to point out that why pre-trib is correct, but I've never seen verses 1 & 2 in this way until this morning to confirm the pre-tribulation theology.

These precious brothers and sisters in Thessalonica were concerned that they were left behind and missed the rapture and they would have to go through the Great Tribulation. How could they come up with that idea unless apostle Paul taught them that the rapture would happen before the tribulation? They couldn't. If the apostle Paul was inspired by the Holy Spirit enough to teach them and write them in the Scripture as the pre-trib, it settles any argument for me.

B. THE APOSTASY AND THE SON OF PERDITION

2 Thessalonians 2:3-5 Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition, 4 who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God. 5 Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you these things?

Paul did not use the term antichrist in his letter. This term is used in the New Testament only by John in 1 John and 2 John. But this is the name we use to identify the last great world dictator whom Paul designated as "that man of sin," "the son of perdition", and "that lawless one".

Satan has been at war with God ever since he, as Lucifer, rebelled against God and tried to capture God's throne in Isa. 14. He tempted Eve in the Garden and, through her, caused Adam to fall according to Gen. 3.

Perdition means destruction, the complete loss of well-being. It is really the opposite of salvation. To call him the son of perdition means his character is marked by this destruction.

Satan will one day produce his masterpiece, the antichrist, who will cause the world to worship satan and believe satan's lies. The Greek prefix 'anti' has two meanings: "against", and "instead of". Satan not only opposes Christ, but he wants to be worshiped and obeyed instead of Christ.

Let's take a look at this antichrist for awhile:

1) The peacemaker

Revelation 6:2 And I looked, and behold, a white horse. He who sat on it had a bow; and a crown was given to him, and he went out conquering and to conquer.

Certainly, this man will be on the scene before the Rapture of the church. He will be a peaceful political leader who unites ten nations of Europe into a strong power bloc.

By the way, I thought it is almost impossible to have 10 nations out of 29 countries which are the current member of the European Union. Little did I know that the EU is divided in East EU and West EU with 5 regions for each.

The rider on the white horse imitates Christ. He goes forth to conquer peacefully: He has a bow, but no arrows. He will bring a brief time of peace to the world before the storm of the Day of the Lord breaks loose.

2) The protector

Daniel 9:25-27 "Know therefore and understand, That from the going forth of the command To restore and build Jerusalem Until Messiah the Prince, There shall be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks; The street shall be built again, and the wall, Even in troublesome times. 26 "And after the sixty-two weeks Messiah shall be cut off, but not for Himself; And the people of the prince who is to come Shall destroy the city and the sanctuary. The end of it shall be with a flood, And till the end of the war desolations are determined. 27 Then he shall confirm a covenant with many for one week; But in the middle of the week He shall bring an end to sacrifice and offering. And on the wing of abominations shall be one who makes desolate, Even until the consummation, which is determined, Is poured out on the desolate."

We cannot examine the exciting details of this prophecy, but it is important to note several facts. First, the prophecy applies to Israel, Jerusalem, and the temple, and not to the church. Second, it announces the time when Messiah will come and accomplish certain purposes for the Jewish people.

The antichrist will temporarily solve the Middle East crisis. Israel will rebuild her temple on the Temple Mount. in peaceful times. It is the signing of this covenant, not the Rapture of the church, that signals the start of Daniel's seventieth week, that seven-year period known as the Day of the Lord.

3) The peace-breaker

Up to this point, antichrist has been a peacemaking leader of ten European nations, obligated to protect Israel. But after three and one-half years, he reveals his true character by taking over the Jewish temple and demanding that the world worship him. Our Lord Jesus called it "the abomination of desolation" in Matt. 24:15, a clear reference to Daniel 9:27.

The world will wonder at this great leader who, with satan's power, will perform signs and wonders and deceive the nations.

4) The persecutor

Satan will vent his wrath against Israel. He will also control the world's economic system that citizens must bear "the mark of the beast" to be able to buy and sell.

C. THE RESTRAINER

2 Thessalonians 2:6-7 And now you know what is restraining, that he may be revealed in his own time. 7 For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only He who now restrains will do so until He is taken out of the way.

Why is satan unable to reveal his “man of sin – the antichrist” sooner? Because God is restraining the forces of evil in the world today. Satan cannot do whatever he wants to do, whenever he pleases unless the Lord allows him. We find a great example of that in Job 1 and 2.

Who is this restrainer? We can tell that it is the Holy Spirit who restrains satan and his demons in this world.

V7 brings much confusion among the believers of Jesus Christ including myself before. For a long time, I was taught by someone and I believed that when the rapture happens, the Holy Spirit will leave the earth with the believers.

That was a wrong. If He leaves the earth during the Great Tribulation, how do the people who are left behind after the rapture get saved? Without Him, no one can. He will be present on the earth during the Great Tribulation because many are saved, sealed and serve God during this period.

The Holy Spirit is taken out of the way of satan so that the devil can bring all this havoc, but not removed from the earth.

D. THE RETURN OF JESUS CHRIST

2 Thessalonians 2:8-12 And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord will consume with the breath of His mouth and destroy with the brightness of His coming. 9 The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders, 10 and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved. 11 And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie, 12 that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.

With a mere breath from the Lord’s mouth, the one-sided fight will be over. In the beginning, God spoke worlds into existence out of nothing. Similarly, during the end times, God will merely breath and His archenemy will be cast into the Lake of Fire.

Just because someone has spiritual power, signs, or wonders, those are not enough to prove they are from God. Satan can perform his own powerful works, either through deception or through his own resources of power.

The deception can only take root in those who do not receive the love of the truth. These people are ready for the deception of the antichrist, because they want a lie, and God will send them a strong delusion. In the end, the antichrist will be also used for the glory of God.

E. APPLICATION

1) The purpose of Bible prophecy is not for us to make a calendar, nor to scratch our itching prophecy bones, but to build godly characters in us.