



THE CHURCH AND THE DAY OF THE LORD

DANIEL GOEPFRICH

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INTRODUCTION

One of the key tenets of classic dispensationalism is a clear and complete distinction between national Israel (including all the promises made to her) and the Church (including the promises made to her). This leads to two important conclusions regarding the interpretation of eschatological passages: the Church is not found anywhere in the Hebrew Scriptures, and, therefore, none of the OT prophetic passages relate directly to her. This is especially true concerning the Day of the Lord.

This article will explore the connection of the Church to the broader Day of the Lord teaching from 1 & 2 Thessalonians, using the descriptions of the Day of the Lord in key Hebrew prophets. It will show that not only must the Church not suffer through Daniel's 70th week but that she must be removed from Earth before the Day of the Lord can commence.

WHAT IS THE "DAY OF THE LORD"?

Before examining Paul's teaching of the Church and the Day of the Lord in 1 & 2 Thessalonians, it is necessary to determine, as much as possible, what Paul knew and expected the Thessalonians to know about the Day of the Lord, based on the teaching of the Hebrew prophets.

Although the phrase יוֹם יְהוָה (*yom yhvah*, "day of the Lord") occurs only 21 times in the Hebrew text (half of them in Joel and Zephaniah),¹ the prophets referred to it in several other ways. More than fifty times they pointed to "that day." Other terms or phrases include "the day," "great day," and "in those days."

Due to the frequent warnings and descriptions about "that day,"² it is possible to put together a comprehensive picture of what that time will include.

¹ Isaiah 13:6, 9; 58:13; Lamentations 2:22; Ezekiel 13:5; 30:3; Joel 1:15; 2:1, 11, 31 (3:4, Hebrew); 3:14 (4:14, Hebrew); Amos 5:18, 20; Obadiah 15; Zephaniah 1:7, 8, 14, 18; 2:2, 3; Malachi 4:5

² Not all of these refer strictly to the future Day of the Lord. However, Zechariah used this phrase exclusively for the Day of the Lord.

JOEL

Joel was likely the earliest writing prophet, and God gave him much detail about the Day of the Lord. After writing about a series of locust invasions that had plagued Judah, Joel turned his attention to the Day of the Lord, giving us the earliest detailed information.

- It was near or imminent (2:1)
- It will include an invasion by an army far more disastrous than the locust (2:2-10)
- It will be nearly impossible to survive (2:11)
- Israel could postpone the judgment if she repented of her sin, pointing to the fact that it was spiritual punishment, not simply physical disaster (2:12-17)
- It will include a restoration of Israel in their land and physical bounty that would more than make up for the disaster of the locust in chapter one (2:18-27; 3:1, 18)
- It will include a fresh outpouring of the Holy Spirit, resulting in new revelation from God (2:28-29)
- It will include both signs in and destruction of the celestial bodies (2:30-31; 3:15)
- It can be escaped by those who will call on Jehovah to deliver them (2:31)
- It will include divine judgments on the nations of the Earth based on their treatment of Israel and the Jews (3:2-8, 19)
- It will include a war between the nations and Jehovah (3:9-16)
- Israel will live in a divinely-assured peace and security from all other nations (3:17, 20-21)

ISAIAH

Like Joel, Isaiah 13-14 describes the Day of the Lord as a time of imminent destruction and judgment. Much of Isaiah's description resembles Joel's, though it is not identical.

- There will be a vast army of nations from all over the world (13:3-5)
- All peoples will be terrified and affected by what Isaiah compared to labor pains and childbirth (13:6-8)
- It will bring destruction upon the whole Earth (13:9)³
- The celestial bodies will be affected (13:10, 13)
- It will be punishment for sin (13:11)
- It will demolish the population of the planet, with almost no one surviving (13:12, 14-18)

³ This refutes those who argue, based on verses one and seventeen, that this prophecy refers only to God's punishment of historical Babylon by the Medo-Persians. See also verses 19-22, which predict a completely uninhabited Babylon, which has not yet taken place.

- Babylon will become a desolate place with no human population, only wild animals (13:19-22)
- Israel will be restored to her land and placed in a position of rulership over all other nations and not be oppressed again (14:1-3)

ZEPHANIAH

Writing about 100 years after Isaiah, Zephaniah's short prophecy is rich in detail about the coming Day of the Lord, once again repeating much of the information from the earlier prophets while emphasizing even more the global reach of the destruction.

- The punishment and disaster will be universal, affecting both humans and animals (1:2-6, 15-18; 2:4-6; 3:8)
- It is imminent (1:7, 14)
- At least part of it will be directed especially toward Israel (1:8-13)
- It will come on Israel because of their sin (1:17; 3:1-7)
- It can be postponed or averted if the people would repent (2:1-3)
- Israel will be restored to their land, take over fallen cities, and gain physical prosperity (2:7, 9)
- It will come on the nations because of how they treated Israel (2:8-10)
- All nations will both know Jehovah and come to worship him within their own countries, making him the universal and sole object of worship (2:11; 3:9-13)
- Assyria will be annihilated, becoming fit only for wild animals (2:13-15)
- Israel will never again receive judgment from God or be oppressed by other nations. Instead, God himself will protect her, and the nations will admire her (3:14-20)

ZECHARIAH

One of the last writing prophets, ministering to the Jews who had returned from their Babylonian/Persian exile, Zechariah never used the phrase "Day of the Lord" but referred exclusively to "that day." While Zechariah contains the most messianic prophecies by percentage (Isaiah contains the most by number), his focus on the Day of the Lord emphasized Israel's place as God's prize and their coming restoration and prosperity more than the judgment aspect.

- Everyone will have crops under which they can relax and fellowship (3:10)
- Jehovah will deliver his special people (9:16)
- Israel's enemies will be judged and destroyed because of their attacks and oppression against Israel, generally, and Jerusalem, specifically. The Davidic throne will be restored. (12:1-14)

- Israel's restoration will include forgiveness of their sin and the removal of all idols, traces of idolatry, and false prophets (13:6)
- 13:7-9 contains one of the few passages in Zechariah that addresses judgment on a part of Israel
- Jehovah will personally wage war against Israel's enemies when the Messiah steps foot in Israel again. Before the Kingdom is established there will be topographical changes to the land. All nations that are spared complete destruction will worship Jehovah under threat of judgment. (14:1-21)

Two overarching themes immediately emerge from these passages helping describe and define what is the Day of the Lord. First, the Day of the Lord will be characterized by utter destruction due to God's fury, wrath, and judgment on sin. It will be all-consuming, covering the entire Earth as well as affecting the celestial bodies. It is for this reason that the Day of the Lord is often equated to Daniel's 70th week (often called "the Tribulation") because the description in Revelation 6-19 is so much like the prophetic warnings. However, the prophets wrote that the Day of the Lord would not stop there. At least Joel, Zephaniah, Malachi, and Zechariah prophesied that the Day of the Lord would also be a time of healing and restoration for Israel, for the nations, and for the Earth. While this must necessarily refer to the coming Messianic/Millennial Kingdom, Zephaniah seems to include the final destruction of Earth and the Eternal State as well (see 2 Peter 3:10-13; Revelation 21:1).

Thus, the Hebrew prophets understood the Day of the Lord to include all the eschatological events, beginning with a time of judgment and including at least the commencement of the Eternal State, if not the entire Eternal State.⁴

THE BACKGROUND OF 1 & 2 THESSALONIANS

According to Acts 17:1-10, Paul preached in the synagogue in Thessalonica for only "three Sabbaths" or three to four weeks before persecution from the Jews caused him to escape for his life.⁵ When Paul and Silas moved from there to Berea, it seems that Timothy stayed behind in Thessalonica or ministered between Thessalonica and Berea with Silas for a while afterward (vs. 13-15). In 1 Thessalonians 3:1-6 Paul recounted that, after Timothy and Silas met up with him in Athens, he sent Timothy back to Thessalonica to check on the church there and finally received a good report along with some questions and concerns from the believers. This was the impetus to write 1

⁴ Twice in Isaiah 65-66 God spoke of a "new heavens and new earth."

⁵ It seems possible that he preached to the Gentiles as well outside of those weeks, so his overall time there may have been a little longer.

Thessalonians, and it was likely Timothy who carried the messages and epistles between the apostle and the church.

Although his time in Thessalonica was brief, Paul must have emphasized eschatological themes, especially regarding the Day of the Lord and the connection (or lack thereof) that the Church will have to it. This is obvious from one passage in each letter where he reminded them of his previous teachings.

“For they are reporting about us what kind of entrance we had to you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God and to wait expectantly for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus, the one who rescues us from the coming wrath.” (1 Thessalonians 1:9-10)⁶

“Do you not remember that while I was still with you, I was telling you these things?” (2 Thessalonians 2:5)

This emphasis is also clearly the theme of both letters. Although the exact phrase “the Day of the Lord” is found only once in each letter (1 Thessalonians 5:2; 2 Thessalonians 2:2), it is a primary focal point among the eschatological teaching throughout. First Thessalonians divides naturally into five sections followed by the chapter divisions. This is significant because each chapter ends with reference to Jesus’ return; the fifth also begins with one.

1. 1:1-10; “Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath to come” (vs. 10)
2. 2:1-20; “the presence of our Lord Jesus at His coming” (vs. 19)
3. 3:1-13; “at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all His saints” (vs. 13)
4. 4:1-18; description of Jesus’ coming for the Church (vs. 13-18)
5. 5:1-28; description of the Day of the Lord (vs. 1-11); “at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” (vs. 23)

Whereas in 1 Thessalonians, Paul had to respond to the concern that believers who died before Jesus’ return would miss it (4:13-18), in 2 Thessalonians he had to assuage their fears that the Day of the Lord had already commenced. It seems they had received a message supposedly authorized by Paul indicating that they were in the Day of the Lord. Second Thessalonians was Paul’s correction of that lie. In chapter two, Paul laid out the

⁶ All English translations from 1 & 2 Thessalonians are my own from the NA28 Greek text. My full translations are found in the Appendix. All other quotations are from the New American Standard Bible (1995).

clearest New Testament teaching about the Day of the Lord, especially in connection with the Church.

EXEGESIS OF SIGNIFICANT 1 THESSALONIANS PASSAGES

The Thessalonian Jews would have known the Hebrew passages well, and Paul's teaching was certainly based on those along with any additional revelation he had personally received. First Thessalonians provides this new revelation.

1 THESSALONIANS 1:9-10

Although the Day of the Lord is not mentioned by name, Paul referred to a specific future time as containing "the coming wrath." This fits perfectly with the Old Testament descriptions of the Day of the Lord. Without going into detail as to how he is doing it, Paul wrote that Jesus "rescues us from the coming wrath." The present tense of the participle, "rescues us," may be significant. Rather than using the simple future tense to declare that "Jesus will rescue us" or an aorist participle ("has rescued us"), Paul wrote that Jesus is somehow presently and actively "rescuing us" from God's wrath.⁷

Without overstepping the bounds of the context, we can postulate that if Jesus is currently rescuing us from the wrath that is still future, he will certainly fully and completely rescue us from the wrath once it has arrived.

It is also important to note that Paul said the believers were awaiting Jesus' return. He did not say anything about them watching for signs, which would be normal if Jesus' coming for Church saints coincides with his return at the Second Coming, which will be preceded by many signs (Matthew 24:29-30). This, too, matches the description from the Hebrew prophets who taught that the Day of the Lord was imminent. Only a few sentences into this letter it seems clear that Jesus' coming for the Church is the next thing to anticipate, before "the coming wrath."

1 THESSALONIANS 2:19-20

Here Paul referred only to Jesus' coming, not the Day of the Lord specifically. Without 2 Thessalonians, it would be impossible to place the timing of this event in relation to the

⁷ Morris sees this as a "timeless present," effectively making it a title, "Jesus, the Rescuer." Leon Morris, *The First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians*. The New International Commentary on the New Testament series, edited by Gordon D. Fee (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991), 54. Most commentators do not address this description of Jesus at all.

Day of the Lord.⁸ However, given the context of 1:10 and Paul's assumption in 2 Thessalonians that his readers should already know this, Jesus' coming must occur before the coming wrath. Additionally, Paul anticipated Jesus' coming for the Church as a time of joy and celebration of his ministry and the salvation of the Thessalonians rather than a time of wrath and judgment.

1 THESSALONIANS 3:12-13

Again, Paul mentioned the coming of Jesus with no reference to its timing or the Day of the Lord. However, the additional detail "with all his saints" is both interesting and important. There are two ways to translate and interpret τῶν ἁγίων αὐτοῦ (*tōn hagiōn autou*), each leading to a different conclusion.

For those who see only one return of Jesus (post-tribulation, historic premillennialism, post-millennium, or amillennial), the ἅγιοι (*hagioi*) are understood generically as "holy ones," with no further identification. Because Jesus will come back "with" them, proponents hold that these are probably the holy angels. This position has the inherent problem, though, that Paul never referred to angels as ἅγιοι in any of his letters, unless this is the sole exception. To build a doctrine from a single, dubious word usage is irrational and exegetically unsound.

For those who see multiple comings by Jesus, however (pre-tribulation, mid-tribulation, or pre-wrath), the ἅγιοι are better understood to be the "saints." For Jesus to come "with" his saints requires either that he came previously "for" his saints or that his saints previously went to be with him. Only further revelation can clarify which of these interpretations is valid.⁹

1 THESSALONIANS 4:13-18

In the longest section on future events thus far, Paul finally began to clarify what he meant in chapters two and three by Jesus' "coming" and filled in several details otherwise unknown. Notice four key points.

First, "bring together with him" (vs. 14) clarifies Paul's earlier comment that Jesus will come "with all his ἅγιοι" (3:13). Those coming with Jesus are the ones "who have fallen

⁸ First Thessalonians contains the first eschatological revelation we have from Paul. Galatians was his only previous letter, but it does not include any eschatological teaching.

⁹ It is also possible that "all his holy ones" may include both angels and saints. For proponents of the various views, see Morris, 111-12.

asleep,” a euphemism for people who have died.¹⁰ These people died “through Jesus,” limiting them only to Church saints. Thus, while the ἅγιοι may include holy angels, Paul clarified that the Church saints would be the prominent members of this group.

Second, Paul twice used the phrase “we who are living, being left behind” (vs. 15, 17) to describe believers who have not yet died when Jesus comes “with all his saints.” These living saints will be gathered “at the same time together with” the deceased saints, not before them. This gathering will be done quickly as evidenced by the verb ἀρπάζω (*harpazō*), which indicates a seizing or snatching rather than a procession, which is how “meeting” has been recently interpreted.

The Greek word *apantēsis* refers to meeting an arriving visitor, especially the act of honoring an important person, such as a dignitary or newly appointed official, by meeting them on arrival. According to Graeco-Roman customs, citizens went out to meet the dignitary and escort him back to their city amid great celebration. Paul may have drawn on this socio-political image because the Thessalonians would have been familiar with the custom. Its use also may imply that believers will escort the Lord back to earth, where He will judge the wicked and establish His kingdom.¹¹

Third, Paul said this “meeting of the Lord” will take place “in the air” (vs. 17). Unlike the coming described in Matthew 24-25, Revelation 19, and the Hebrew prophets, Paul did not indicate that Jesus will come to the Earth at this time. On the contrary, in John 14:2-3, Jesus told his apostles that when he returned to receive them, “I will. . . receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also.” The context of this coming and receiving them is to the Father’s house, not back to Earth. Paul confirmed that, starting with Jesus’ coming, all Church-age believers (deceased and living) “will always be together with the Lord.”

Fourth, Paul’s teaching about Jesus’ coming for the Church was to bring encouragement to his readers (vs. 18). By itself, this does not speak to the timing of this coming and the gathering. Whether it will occur before, during, or after the Day of the Lord judgments, the anticipation of his coming should provoke joy and comfort (another valid translation instead of “encouragement”). However, when seen in conjunction with the previous passages in this letter (and what is yet to come in chapter five), we must conclude that this gathering will take place before the Day of the Lord as part of Jesus’ rescuing “us from the coming wrath” (1:10).

¹⁰ Paul’s first use of this word is in the present subjunctive, “those who may be presently sleeping,” possibly indicating that there will be a time that they will no longer be sleeping.

¹¹ John D. Barry et al., *Faithlife Study Bible* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2012, 2016), 1 Th 4:17.

1 THESSALONIANS 5:1-11, 23

This passage contains the only direct mention of the Day of the Lord in 1 Thessalonians and provides a wealth of information. First, Paul opened this section with *περὶ δὲ* (*peri de*) with a genitive object, "now concerning," a construct he used eight times in his letters.¹² In each case, without exception, he used it as a transitional statement to introduce a new topic distinct from what came before it.¹³ Grammatically, this is a strong indicator that the commencement of the Day of the Lord should be considered as a separate event from the gathering of the Church saints described in 4:13-18.

Second, the Day of the Lord will commence suddenly, "like a thief at night" (vs. 2). It will be a time when the inhabitants of Earth will be enjoying "peace and security" (vs. 3). Yet this "sudden destruction" will also come gradually, like labor pains, indicating that the destruction/judgment will begin suddenly but not in full force.

Third, there will be no possible way for those who are in the Day of the Lord to escape it. Paul used the double negative with an aorist subjunctive verb (*οὐ μὴ ἐκφύγωσιν, ou mē ekphugōsin*), the strongest possible negation in Koine Greek, eliminating any hint of possibility.¹⁴ *ἐκφεύγω* (*ekphugō*) is used only eight times in the New Testament, always concerning escaping from physical danger or God's judgment.¹⁵ According to Luke 21:34-35, which contains similar warnings about being watchful, Jesus said that "it will come upon all those who dwell on the face of all the earth." (NASB) Once the Day of the Lord has commenced, those who enter it have no way to escape it. This refutes those who hold any position that allows for a rapture at any time during the Day of the Lord.¹⁶

¹² 1 Corinthians 7:1, 25; 8:1; 12:1; 16:1, 12; 1 Thessalonians 4:9; 5:1

¹³ This is consistent with two of the other three similar constructions in the New Testament as well – Matthew 22:31 (Mark 12:26) and Acts 21:25. The third construction continues the previous context by providing new detail (Matthew 24:36; Mark 13:32). Thus, of the eleven uses of this construction in the New Testament, only one connects the new passage to what came before it; the others all begin a distinctly new topic.

¹⁴ Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1996), 468.

¹⁵ Physical danger – Acts 16:27; 19:16; 2 Corinthians 11:33; God's judgment – Luke 21:36; Romans 2:3; 1 Thessalonians 5:3; Hebrews 2:3; 12:25

¹⁶ For those who attempt to claim that Joel 2:38 offers deliverance or rescue we might say that, while Jehovah will certainly deliver those who call upon his name, the form of deliverance is unstated. This may be death at the hand of the judgments, resulting in salvation in heaven, or it could be protection amidst the judgments, resulting in physical entrance to the kingdom. One cannot use Joel 2:38 to support a mid-tribulation, pre-wrath, or partial rapture position.

Fourth, Paul used a different word for "sleep" in 5:6, 7, 10 than he did in 4:13-15. In chapter four the word was a euphemism for the physical death of Church saints before Jesus' coming. In chapter five it is a normal word for physical sleep, but Paul set it against drunkenness and likened it metaphorically to sobriety. Thus, we may interpret the "sleep" of chapter five to refer to spiritual apathy which would cause Church believers to not recognize the Day of the Lord if it were to commence.

Finally, in verse ten Paul used the word "wrath" for the third time in this letter. The first use is in 1:10, where he described the wrath as still future and Jesus as our rescuer. The second use was of God's wrath that Paul's opponents were heaping upon themselves by standing against him and his message (2:16). In this third use, Paul wrote that God "did not consign us to wrath." This is couched by two instances of σωτηρία (*sōtēria*).

A proper translation of σωτηρία in verses 8-9 is essential because it affects the interpretation of the passage. Often translated "salvation," this is usually assumed to refer to eternal salvation. If this was Paul's meaning, then he encouraged his readers to put on the "hope of salvation" and said that they were consigned to "obtaining salvation" instead of God's wrath.

However, the basic meaning of σωτηρία is simply "deliverance," which can be physical or spiritual. If Paul meant physical deliverance (rather than spiritual salvation), then he wanted the Thessalonians to wear the "hope of deliverance" (from the coming wrath) and declared that God had consigned them to "obtaining deliverance" instead of wrath. This translation and interpretation best fits both the immediate context in chapter five and the normal use of the verb ῥύομαι (*ruomai*, "rescue, deliver") in 1:10.

Because of this guaranteed deliverance from the wrath and judgments of the Day of the Lord, Paul once again stated that this should be an encouragement even for lethargic believers. If there were any indication that any or all believers would enter the Day of the Lord, Paul's encouragement would be impractical. The only way for this passage to be encouraging is if no Church saint will be caught in it at all.

Thus, from 1 Thessalonians we conclude that Jesus will come to gather all Church saints, both those deceased and living at that time; that it will occur in the air, with the saints returning to the Father's house with him; and that it will precede the coming wrath of the Day of the Lord.

EXEGESIS OF 2 THESSALONIANS 2:1-10

At some point after receiving Paul's first letter, the Thessalonian believers had a problem. They were facing intense persecution and had come to believe that the Day of the Lord had begun. This belief was fueled by a message they had received stating that was indeed the case. They sent their concerns back to Paul who responded with this letter, 2 Thessalonians.

Before getting to their specific question, Paul had a few words of encouragement. He acknowledged that their suffering was painful, but that God would pay back their enemies with ultimate judgment (1:5-10). This will take place "at the revelation of the Lord Jesus from heaven with his mighty angels" (1:7). This phrasing is important because, unlike in 1 Thessalonians 3:13, this appearance is not called Jesus' "coming" but his "revelation," a term never used in relation to the Church, and it will occur "with his mighty angels," not "with all the saints." Paul's terminology seems to make a clear distinction between Jesus' coming – a time of celebration and joy for the Church – and Jesus' revelation – a time of judgment and destruction for residents of Earth.

Their question was "concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together with him" (2:1). The Thessalonian believers had become convinced that "the Day of the Lord has come" (vs. 2) meaning they had missed the Gathering Together.¹⁷

Apparently, they had received a message – either through a prophetic spirit or possibly even a forged letter – stating that the persecution they were experiencing equated to the Day of the Lord judgments. Since Paul had already written that those who enter the Day of the Lord can never escape it (1 Thessalonians 5:3), they were terrified for their lives.¹⁸ Combined with the teaching of 1 Thessalonians, this leads to the conclusion that Paul had taught them that the Gathering Together would certainly take place before the Day of the Lord. "Do you not remember that when I was with you I was telling you these things?" (vs. 5)¹⁹

¹⁷ Because the term *rapture* is a transliteration from the Vulgate translation of 1 Thessalonians 4 and its use is often criticized, the rest of this article will primarily refer to "the Gathering Together," as a more literal translation of the Greek noun, ἐπισυναγωγή (*episunagōgē*), in 2 Thessalonians 2:1. It is a more precise way to refer to the event usually called "the Rapture."

¹⁸ Given the description of the Day of the Lord in the Hebrew prophets, they had every reason to be terrified if they had truly entered the Day of the Lord!

¹⁹ "I was telling you these things" (ταῦτα ἔλεγον ὑμῖν, *tauta elegon humin*) is in the imperfect tense, meaning that Paul told them this repeatedly. Not only was this not new information to them, they had been well-schooled in it through Paul's emphatic repetition on this matter.

However, because of their concern and fear, Paul took the opportunity to remind them that the Day of the Lord could not have come yet because certain events must take place first. Specifically, two events (with an implied third) must precede the commencement of the Day of the Lord: the ἀποστασία (*apostasia*) and the revealing of the man of lawlessness. Because the man of lawlessness is currently being restrained, Paul was clear that the restraint had to be removed as well.

Paul wrote that the Day of the Lord cannot commence “unless the ἀποστασία comes first and the man of lawlessness is revealed” (vs. 3). This phrase (ἐὰν μὴ ἔλθῃ ἡ ἀποστασία πρῶτον καὶ ἀποκαλυφθῇ ὁ ἄνθρωπος τῆς ἀνομίας, *ean mē elthē hē apostasia prōton kai apokalupthē ho anthrōpos tēs anomias*) contains two aorist subjunctives following a negative particle. This indicates that the main subject (in this case, the Day of the Lord) cannot take place without the events governed by the subjunctive verbs (the ἀποστασία²⁰ and the revealing of the man of lawlessness). Additionally, Paul included the word πρῶτον (*prōton*, “first”). Whether this is attached to ἀποστασία alone or to both verbs is debated. However, what is clear is that these two events must precede the commencement of the Day of the Lord.

However, to identify the timing of the Day of the Lord in connection to the Gathering Together, we must answer at least one question regarding each event: 1) What is the ἀποστασία? 2) How will the man of lawlessness be revealed? 3) Who or what is the Restrainer? Consider several immediate and obvious conclusions from the passage:

1. The Thessalonians were afraid that they had missed the Gathering Together and the Day of the Lord had begun (vs. 1-2); thus, Paul had taught them that the Gathering Together would keep Church saints from the Day of the Lord.
2. The ἀποστασία and the revelation of the man of lawlessness must precede the Day of the Lord (vs. 3); thus, those two events must take place either 1) before the Gathering Together, 2) simultaneously with the Gathering Together or 3) after the Gathering Together but still before the commencement of the Day of the Lord.
3. Something was/is restraining the man of lawlessness from being revealed. Paul referred to this restraint/restrainer both in the neuter (τὸ κατέχον, *to katechon*, vs. 6) and masculine (ὁ κατέχων, *ho katechōn*, vs. 7). Paul intentionally switched to the masculine, indicating that he intended to imply personality. Thus, the restrainer is more than just a force or entity but a person.

²⁰ Due to the uncertainty of its meaning, ἀποστασία (*apostasia*) will remain untranslated unless further examination clarifies its meaning in this context.

4. The restraint will be removed at an identifiable point in time future to Paul's writing (vs. 7). Whoever is restraining the man of lawlessness from being revealed will stop his restraining, opening the way for the man of lawlessness' revelation. Thus, the man of lawlessness can and will be revealed only once the restraint is removed. The timing of this removal may be in conjunction with the Gathering Together or the *ἀποστασία* or may be a separate event altogether, and the removal of the restraint does not necessarily imply the immediate revelation of the man of lawlessness, only that he will then be able to be revealed.
5. The man of lawlessness will come with the power of Satan as evidenced by miracles and signs and false wonders (vs. 8-10). Thus, he will be identifiable by anyone who can interpret these signs, yet he will deceive many.
6. Paul expected his readers to know these facts already and accept them as truth (vs. 5). Although they had heard something which tried to shake them to their core and led them to believe they had missed the Gathering Together and entered the Day of the Lord, Paul thought that the teaching he had already provided them was sufficient to answer their concerns.

THE ἀποστασία

The meaning of *ἀποστασία* has notoriously eluded scholars for centuries. Even the usually-thorough John Walvoord spent only four pages of his 800-page tome, *The Prophecy Knowledge Handbook*, on this passage and did not address the *ἀποστασία* once, focusing only on the man of lawlessness.²¹ In what some consider to be a parallel passage, 2 Timothy 3:1-5, which does refer to apostasy in the Church, he did not make a connection to 2 Thessalonians at all.

Major English translations have variously translated *ἀποστασία* as "the rebellion" (NET, NLT, NIV, ESV); "the apostasy" (NASB, HCSB); and "a falling away" (KJV) – each with its own adherents. There are three primary views of what this could be and when it will occur.

Pre-rapture. The first view is that, toward the end of the Church Age before the Gathering Together, there will be an apostasy or departure from the true faith from within the Church. Supporting this view is the fact that this is prophesied in 2 Timothy 3:1-5, along with other passages which describe a general worsening of the state of the Church.²² There are certainly people within the Church who are not believers or are weak,

²¹ John F. Walvoord, *The Prophecy Knowledge Handbook*, (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1990), 491-494.

²² See Acts 20:29-30; 2 Peter 2:1; Jude 4; 1 John 2:18-19; 4:1

immature Christians; these will fall away from the faith. Most English translations presuppose this view based on the most common use of ἀποστασία, which often has a religious connotation, especially in the Septuagint (LXX).²³

The fact that this apostasy will occur in the Christian Church is beyond question; it would otherwise not be an "apostasy." The man of the lawlessness will be its head.²⁴

2 Thessalonians 1 having commended their steadfastness in the faith, the apostasy can only be one from the faith in Christ; and this is acknowledged also by Calvin. Indeed, the article denotes *that* apostasy known to the Thessalonians by oral instruction from the prophets; comp. Dan 8:23; Dan 11:30; the spreading apostasy from the faith.²⁵

One inherent problem with this position, especially Lenski's assumption that it will be headed up by the man of lawlessness, is that there is no single, world-wide Church within which one man could instigate an apostasy. The plethora of denominations in the United States alone would not follow a single leader from within any one of them, much less from an outsider. A second difficulty comes in considering that there is already an apostate World Council of Churches, in which no biblical church or denomination is a member. If this unified "Church" does not already fulfill the prophecy of a pre-Rapture apostasy, it is incomprehensible to imagine something even further from the truth.²⁶

Post-rapture. One of the most common views is that this will be a rebellion against God, after the Rapture, possibly led by Antichrist himself.²⁷ This would probably include those

²³ The LXX is the Greek translation of the Old Testament produced around 150 B.C. See Joshua 22:22; 2 Chronicles 29:19 (another form, ἀπόστασις [*apostasis*], is in 33:19); 1 Maccabees 2:15; Jeremiah 2:19; see also Acts 21:21.

²⁴ R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistles to the Colossians and Thessalonians* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2008), 407.

²⁵ John Peter Lange, *A Commentary on the Holy Scriptures Critical, Doctrinal, and Homiletical*, BibleWorks electronic edition 2017.

²⁶ A simple internet search offers many groups that believe that the WCC is or is part of the ἀποστασία. See, for example, https://www.scionofzion.com/great_apostasy.htm (accessed January 19, 2018).

²⁷ Constable promotes this view in his *Notes on 2 Thessalonians, 2017 edition*. <http://www.soniclight.com/constable/notes.htm>.

who had only professed the Christian faith before the Rapture but were not truly believers.

The major support for this view is the natural rebellion or revolt against God that will take place once the Church has been removed and only unbelievers (including those who had professed faith) are left. This is especially strong considering 2 Thessalonians 2:11 – “And for this reason God will send them a powerful delusion so they will believe the lie.”

One difficulty with this view is the question of whether Paul thought his readers would see the ἀποστασία. Telling them that the Day of the Lord had not commenced because the ἀποστασία had not yet happened may indicate that they could see it take place. If he did not mean to imply that they would witness the ἀποστασία, then it could certainly take place after the Gathering Together but before the Day of the Lord begins.

After the catching away of those in Christ (1 Thess 4:17), all who are truly in him will be gone. Conditions will be ripe for people, especially those who call themselves Christian but are not really such, to turn their backs on God in what they do as well as in what they already have in thought. Then their insincerity will demonstrate itself outwardly. This worldwide anti-God movement will be so universal as to earn itself a special designation: “*the* apostasy” – i.e., the climax of the increasing apostate tendencies evident before the rapture of the church.²⁸

The rapture. The third view is that the ἀποστασία refers to the Gathering Together itself. Because the base meaning of ἀποστασία is simply “departure,” and since Paul prefixed it with the definite article (“the departure”), some hold that there is only one specific departure Paul had already taught in Thessalonica – the departure of the Church from this world, that is, the Gathering Together.

The Greek word for “falling away”, taken by itself, does not mean religious apostasy or defection. Neither does the word mean “to fall”, as the Greeks have another word for that. The best translation of the word is “to depart.” The apostle Paul refers here to a definite event which he calls “the departure,” and which will occur just before the start of the tribulation. This is the rapture of the church.²⁹

²⁸ Robert L. Thomas, “1 & 2 Thessalonians” in *Ephesians – Philemon*, vol. 11, *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, edited by Frank E. Gaebelin (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), 321-22.

²⁹ Paul Lee Tan, *The Interpretation of Prophecy* (Dallas: Paul Lee Tan Prophetic Ministries, Inc., 2010), 341.

Although several conservative scholars hold this view³⁰, the strength of this position – the interpretation of ἀποστασία as “departure” – is also its weakness. While this is certainly one of its legitimate meanings, none of the major lexical tools place it first or connect that meaning to this passage. Moulton and Milligan, Louw-Nida, Liddel-Scott-Jones (LSJ), and BDAG all list some type of “rebellion” as the major usage of this word in antiquity. However, the fact that they acknowledge “departure” as a possibility (LSJ puts “departure, disappearance” as its second listing³¹) does legitimize the possibility of this interpretation. This is often based on understanding it as a cognate of the verbs ἀνίσταμαι (*anistamai*) or ἀφίημι (*aphiēmi*), a theory which is often dismissed as shown in the following paragraph.

The case for understanding ἀποστασία as the Rapture in 2 Thessalonians 2:3 has not been proven. The appeal to the translation of the word in versions prior to the King James has no merit whatsoever. While the English translation “departure” can refer to spatial departure, there is no evidence that this is the intended meaning of the word in these early versions in 2 Thessalonians 2:3. The lexical argument that ἀποστασία itself could have that meaning in this verse seems unlikely. The strongest argument for the Rapture view is the contextual considerations. These certainly have merit, but in my opinion do not rise to the level of probability. ἀποστασία most likely refers to a religious apostasy, and therefore its occurrence in 2 Thessalonians 2:3 should not be used as evidence for the pretribulational Rapture.³²

THE MAN OF LAWLESSNESS

A second event that must occur before the day of the Lord is that “the man of lawlessness” must be revealed. Interestingly, although it is commonly used in Christian churches and theology books, the term “Antichrist” is used only once by the biblical writers specifically to the coming world ruler. Instead, John referred to anyone who denied the Word made flesh as an antichrist (1 John 2:18, 22; 4:1-3; 2 John 7). However,

³⁰ David Olander, *The Greatness of the Rapture* (Tyndale Seminary Press, 2009); Paul Lee Tan, *The Interpretation of Prophecy* (Bible Communications, Inc., 1982); Andy Woods, “2 Thessalonians 2:3a – Apostasy or Rapture” (http://www.spiritandtruth.org/teaching/topics_by_andy_woods/75_Apostasy_or_Rapture/20150412_apostasy_or_rapture_slides.pdf). Additionally, Pentecost listed it as a possibility in his classic, *Things to Come* (1958).

³¹ s.v. ἀποστασία, <http://stephanus.tlg.uci.edu/lsg/#eid=14158&context=lsj&action=from-search> (accessed January 19, 2018).

³² William W. Combs, 1998, “Is Apostasia In 2 Thessalonians 2:3 A Reference To The Rapture?”, *Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal*, 03:63-87. Accessed December 29, 2017, <https://www.galaxie.com/article/dbsj03-1-03>.

Paul used a series of phrases to describe how evil this man will be: “the man of lawlessness . . . the son of destruction . . . the lawless one” (vs. 3-10). He will publicly and unashamedly oppose and place himself above all gods, to the point that he will set himself up to be worshiped in God’s Temple in Jerusalem (a fulfillment of Daniel 9:27 and Matthew 24:15). Since his arrival will come “with all kinds of miracles and signs and false wonders and with every kind of evil deception” and since his revealing must take place before the Day of the Lord and since that had not (and still has not) yet happened, Paul assured and comforted his readers (and us!) that they had not entered the Day of the Lord.

The question of identifying the man of lawlessness relates to his coming: how and when will he be revealed? Will his “coming” and “being revealed” occur at the same time or will he come/arrive on the scene without being revealed right away? There are at least three events prophesied in Daniel that Paul could have meant.³³

The coalition of kings and the little horn. Daniel 7 records a vision in which Daniel saw a terrible beast with ten horns symbolizing ten kings in a coalition (vs. 7, 24). Into that group came an eleventh horn/king, smaller than the rest, but it was able to overthrow three of the others (vs. 8, 24). That horn/king will be given power over Israel for three-and-a-half years, during which he will “wage war” and “harass” them, even changing “times established by law” (vs. 21, 25, NET). This will take place during the second half of the 70th week.

It seems likely, based on the covenant that he will sign (see next subsection, “The covenant with Israel”) that he will have to consolidate his power over the remaining seven kings before signing the covenant with Israel. Thus, this consolidation is the earliest event that could reveal him. However, Paul wrote that his coming would be “with all kinds of miracles and signs and false wonders,” yet there is nothing in Daniel to substantiate that this coming to power, although certainly done by Satan’s power, will necessitate signs and wonders. While it is possible that he will, in fact, use signs and wonders to come to power, Daniel does not state that definitively.

The covenant with Israel. In Daniel 9, Gabriel revealed to the ancient sage that a coming king will “make a firm covenant with the many for one week, but in the middle of the week he will put a stop to sacrifice and grain offering” (vs. 27a). The context has given this the name, “Daniel’s 70th Week.” Much has been written providing evidence

³³ Potential identifications that are found in Revelation are ignored in this section because John did not see those details until 40-50 years after Paul wrote 2 Thessalonians, and there is nothing in Scripture to indicate that Paul could have known them. However, the Thessalonian believers would have been very familiar with Daniel’s writings.

that each of these “weeks” refers to seven years.³⁴ Thus, this covenant with Israel will be for seven years. Whether it will be a new covenant/treaty or enforcement of an existing one is debated, but he will be at the center of it.

While it seems obvious that anyone who sees a ruler overthrow three other major world powers, put himself over seven others, and then sign a seven-year covenant with Israel, should be able to identify this man as the prophesied Antichrist, there are at least three points to consider against it.

First, many Americans have recently realized how easy it is for the government to control what news is reported to the people and when, not unlike what Orwell predicted in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and something that many other countries experience regularly. It is not difficult to imagine that a man, with Satan’s backing, who could effectively become the de facto ruler of the world, could not use the media in any way he wished. If he wanted to portray a unified, one-world government without him in control (“hiding” his revealing), it seems that he could certainly do it.

Second, although the seven-year covenant with Israel will initiate the 70th week, there is nothing in Daniel to indicate that either the details or the signers of the treaty will be made immediately available to the populace. Building on the previous difficulty, the man of lawlessness could allow the information out slowly enough to not raise suspicions about himself.

Third, as mentioned previously, the signing of this covenant does not necessarily require signs and wonders, something that Paul said his coming (but not necessarily his revealing) would include.

“Abomination of Desolation.” The second half of Daniel 9:27 states, “On the wing of abominations will come one who makes desolate, even until a complete destruction, one that is decreed, is poured out on the one who makes desolate.” In Daniel 7:11, the beast from which the little horn/king emerged is destroyed. This is confirmed in 7:26 where “his dominion will be taken away, annihilated and destroyed forever.” Thus, the time of abominations must fit within the second half of the 70th week. Dispensationalists usually equate it with three things: 1) the stopping of sacrifices and offerings (Daniel 9:27a); 2) the “abomination of desolation” mentioned by Jesus in Matthew 24:15; and 3) the man of lawlessness establishing himself as god in the Jerusalem Temple (2 Thessalonians 2:4).

This almost certainly coincides with the beast that John saw in Revelation 13:5-8 who will blaspheme God for 42 months, make war with God’s people, and be worshiped by the

³⁴ One excellent example is Sir Robert Anderson’s, *The Coming Prince*.

rest of the world. He will also have a false prophet who will build an image, demand that people worship it, and will perform signs and wonders (Revelation 13:13-15).

Thus, there are at least three points from the Hebrew Scriptures at which someone could identify the man of lawlessness – assuming the information was available to them – proving that he had been revealed. The earliest could be before the 70th week begins, with his coming to power over the coalition of kings. The second could be at the commencement of the 70th week, when he signs the covenant with Israel. The latest could be the mid-point of the 70th week, when he breaks his covenant and declares himself to be god in the Jerusalem Temple. Paul wrote that the Thessalonians should have known that they were not yet in the Day of the Lord because the man of lawlessness had not yet been revealed.

THE RESTRAINER/RESTRAINT

The third event that will precede the Day of the Lord is that “the one who holds him back will [be] . . . taken out of the way” (vs. 7) before the man of lawlessness is revealed. (Obviously, this must precede his revealing.) Again, there has been great debate over who or what restrains the lawless one, with several suggestions offered.³⁵ Much of the confusion is due to Paul’s dual description using both the neuter and masculine participles in vs. 6-7 (τὸ κατέχων. . . ὁ κατέχων). This has caused issue between those who insist that only the restraint is removed as those who read in verse seven that the restrainer himself (ὁ κατέχων) is removed.

One of the most ancient opinions was that the Roman Empire was the restrainer. In the early third century, Tertullian asked, “What obstacle is there but the Roman state, the falling away of which, by being scattered into ten kingdoms, shall introduce Antichrist upon (its own ruins)?”³⁶ While this may have made sense in Tertullian’s day, the Roman Empire is long since gone, yet the events of 2 Thessalonians 2 have not yet taken place. Because of this, scholars have pointed to other world governments throughout the centuries – or human government in general – as potential restrainers.³⁷

³⁵ Thomas mentions “the preaching of the gospel, the Jewish state, the binding of Satan. . . Gentile world dominion, and human government” as “improbable” options. (Thomas, 324.) Morris gives a similar list, adding an evil force and elaborating on each one (Morris, 225-229).

³⁶ Tertullian, *On the Resurrection of the Flesh*, Chapter XXIV in Philip Schaff, *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Volume 3. Bibleworks v. 10 electronic edition.

³⁷ This could make sense if one considers that the entirety of Western civilization is simply a diffused version of the Roman Empire, much like the iron/clay feet of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream in Daniel 2.

The biggest problem with most suggestions is that since the man of lawlessness will come with Satan's power, is it possible that anything merely physical or anyone merely human could have stopped or restrained him for two millennia? Is anything in the natural realm more powerful than Satan? Of course not! Even "Michael the archangel. . . did not dare" to confront him without God's permission or authority (Jude 9), and there is nothing in all of Scripture that hints that human government can bind, stop, or restrain him. On the contrary, he is the god of this current world/age (Ephesians 2:1-3; 1 John 5:19).

Another prominent view is that the Church is the restrainer. In this case, the Gathering Together would release the man of lawlessness to begin his evil campaign since there will be no godly influence in his way. However, this has the same difficulty as the previous view, since the Church is not more powerful than Satan. Only God is powerful enough to restrain Satan and his work, and the Holy Spirit is the member of the Godhead specifically acting in and against the world during the Church Age. Thus, many hold that, once the Church has been removed and the Holy Spirit no longer indwells the Body of Christ on Earth, he will release his hold on "the hidden power of lawlessness [which] is already at work" (vs. 7). This would make the Holy Spirit the Restrainer (masculine participle) and his work the restraint (neuter participle).

Morris rejects the view that the Holy Spirit is the restrainer. Disagreeing with Thomas' contention that the Spirit will revert to the type of ministry he had during Old Testament times, Morris argues, "But Paul does not speak of a reversion to the Old Testament pattern, he says that the restrainer will be taken out of the way. The Spirit was not 'taken out of the way' in Old Testament times; indeed, he engaged in vigorous action at times (e.g., Judg. 14:6; Ezek. 37:1)."³⁸ Instead, he opts for the presence of law, generally, as the great restrainer of evil. "It is when law is taken out of the way that the Lawless One will rule."³⁹ As shown above, though, mere human law – even though ordained by God (Romans 13:1) – is no match for all of Satan's power through which he wants to, and will, rule this world.

There are two other reasons to believe that the restrainer is God himself (whether generally or the Spirit specifically). First, Paul said that the man of lawlessness "will be revealed at his own time." This phrase indicates that there is a specific time at which he needs to be revealed or is appointed to be revealed, and, conversely, that he will not or

³⁸ Morris, 229.

³⁹ Morris, 227.

cannot be revealed until that time arrives. This fits within the doctrine of an overall plan of God regarding eschatological events that even Satan cannot alter.

A second reason to believe that God is the restrainer builds off the previous concept regarding God's eschatological plan. Lenski⁴⁰ notes that all three times that Paul wrote of the revealing of the man of lawlessness he used the passive voice: ἀποκαλυφθῆ (apokaluphthē, "is revealed," vs. 3), ἀποκαλυφθῆναι (apokaluphthēnai, "to be revealed," vs. 6), ἀποκαλυφθήσεται (apokaluphthēsēstai, "will be revealed," vs. 8). Satan's man will not reveal himself at the moment of his own choosing. Instead, he will be revealed (passive) by an outside agent at the time of that agent's choosing. Because of this, it makes sense to conclude that the agent who will reveal the man of lawlessness is also the one who is restraining him until the appropriate time. If Satan is that outside agent who wants to reveal his man, then he would be his own restrainer, something both illogical and unfounded in Scripture. On the other hand, if God is the restrainer, then he will also be the one who reveals Satan's man at the right time within his own greater plan.

This conclusion also affects how we interpret the timing of his revealing. If God is going to reveal him to the world personally, then the above suggestions about how he might hide himself from public view may not be possible. If God wants to reveal him immediately from the coalition, for instance, there will be nothing he or Satan can do to prevent that. See the section "The Man of Lawlessness" for further discussion on the potential times of his revealing.

Concurrent with this idea that the passive verbs point to a single restrainer/revealer other than the man of lawlessness himself is the fact that Paul used the noun (ἀποκάλυψις, *apokalupsis*) to teach about Jesus' revelation. Jesus will have a revelation (presumably self-induced); the man of lawlessness will be revealed by someone else. There are some who take issue with the fact that the Holy Spirit cannot be "taken out of the way" because his omnipresence precludes any form of removal. This was Morris' argument above, that the Holy Spirit was present and active throughout the Old Testament, not "out of the way." However, they must deal with Paul's assertion that ὁ κατέχων ("the restrainer"), not τὸ κατέχον ("the restraint"), will be "taken out of the way." Can we see the Holy Spirit "taken out of the way" without violating his essential attributes? Yes, we can.

Imagine a guard blocking the entrance to a sports stadium. Fans are lining up outside the gate, pushing and shoving to gain entrance, but the guard will not let them through because it is not time for the doors to be opened. However, at the appropriate time, the

⁴⁰ Lenski, 417.

guard turns, unlocks the door, and steps aside. While he is still present and can be as active as he needs or wants, he is no longer in the way of the fans. In a similar way, Satan is pushing against the Holy Spirit, who will not allow him to bring forth his man of lawlessness until it is time for the doors to be opened. When that time comes, the Holy Spirit can step aside – without jeopardizing his omnipresence – from in front of Satan and the man of lawlessness so he can be revealed, while still being present and active. Thus, it is no contradiction to say that the Holy Spirit will be “taken out of the way” yet still be actively working throughout the 70th week. If this is the case, it makes a strong case for the revealing to be in Daniel 7, when the little horn/king begins his campaign for world rulership. For this reason, the remainder of this article will use the phrases “step aside” and “taken out of the way” interchangeably to denote the Spirit’s un-restraining presence.

WILL THE CHURCH SEE THESE EVENTS?

The question remains as to whether the Church will see any or all these events. The exact timing of the Gathering Together is not given, only that it must occur before the Day of the Lord commences. Since these other events must also occur before the Day of the Lord, there are only a few legitimate ways to connect them with the Gathering Together. Second Thessalonians is clear that the chronology of the events is as follows:

Apostasy -> Restrainer out of the way -> Man of lawlessness revealed

It is into this framework that we attempt to place the Gathering Together. The following chart offers six options for when the Gathering Together may occur, and a seventh option, not on the chart, will be addressed below.

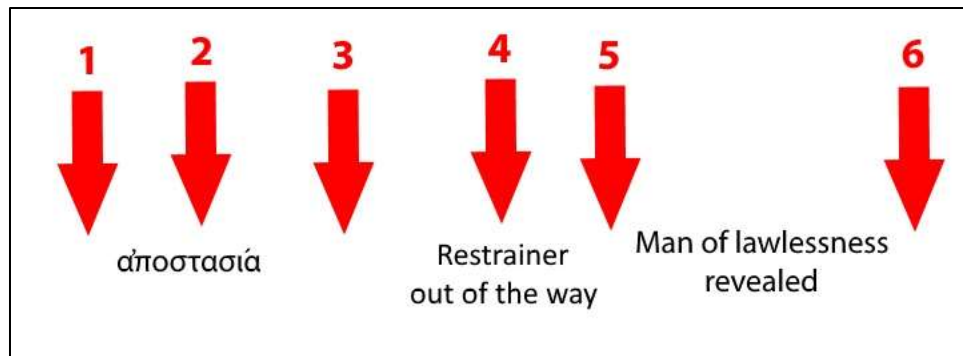


Figure 1: Potential placement of the Gathering Together

Option 1: If the Gathering Together occurs before the ἀποστασία, then the ἀποστασία is the global rebellion or revolt against God by unbelievers after the Church is removed. The Church will not see any of the 2 Thessalonians 2 events.

Option 2: If the Gathering Together is the *ἀποστασία*, then the *ἀποστασία* is the departure of the Church, not a religious rebellion against God. The Church will be gone before the Restrainer is out of the way and will not witness the revealing of the man of lawlessness.

Option 3: If the Gathering Together comes after the *ἀποστασία*, then the *ἀποστασία* is the apostasy within the Church that will rise before the Gathering Together. At some point after the Church is removed, the Restrainer will also step aside so the man of lawlessness can be revealed, but the Church will not see him be revealed.

Option 4: If the Gathering Together is the same as the Restrainer stepping aside, then Holy Spirit's indwelling the Church is the Restrainer, so at the Gathering Together, the restraining work of the Holy Spirit will end, paving the way for the man of lawlessness to be revealed. The Church will not know who this man is. In this scenario, the *ἀποστασία* will be the apostasy in the Church. This is the most common Pre-Tribulational interpretation.

Option 5: If the Gathering Together occurs after the Restrainer steps aside, then the Church may witness the rising coalition of the ten kings of Daniel 7, but may or may not see the little horn/king subvert three and come to power. (This is dependent on what will constitute his "revealing." See the section "The Man of Lawlessness" above.)

Option 6: If the Gathering Together occurs after the man of lawlessness is revealed, then the Gathering Together would be the final event before the Day of the Lord begins. The *ἀποστασία* will ravish the Church, possibly caused by the "mystery of lawlessness" that is already at work. Once the Restrainer is out of the way, the man of lawlessness can begin to turn people even further from the truth (possibly part of the *ἀποστασία*). Depending on one's placement of the man of lawlessness's revealing, this scenario also allows for a Gathering Together that is not pre-tribulational. If he is not fully revealed until the middle of Daniel's 70th week, at the breaking of the covenant, the Church could survive through the first half of the 70th week. However, this is the latest it could be, still refuting both the Pre-Wrath and Post-Tribulational interpretations. Although the Church could see the revealing of the man of lawlessness, the Church cannot enter the Day of the Lord. This is the least likely of all the potential options because it requires an extremely late revealing and absolutely no wrath or judgment during the first half of the 70th week, something that cannot be proven from Scripture.

Option 7 (not shown): If the Gathering Together, the *ἀποστασία*, and the Restrainer's stepping aside are all the same event, then the *ἀποστασία* is the departure of the Church, and the Restrainer is the Holy Spirit in the Church. This scenario sees the Church

experiencing two of the three events, but never seeing the revelation of the man of lawlessness. This is the second-most-common Pre-Tribulational interpretation.

There are too many questions to determine conclusively from Thessalonians alone which of these events the Church will see or experience. For instance, must the restrainer be out of the way before the ten-king coalition forms, before the little horn subverts three of them, or only before he begins to control the rest of them? First Thessalonians implies that there will be no signs at all for the Church to see, giving more support to an early Gathering Together followed by the signal events (option one or two above). Regardless, the theme of 2 Thessalonians, in conjunction with the teachings of 1 Thessalonians, require that the Church be gathered with Jesus before the Day of the Lord can commence. No matter when it happens, the Day of the Lord must follow the Gathering Together.

CONCLUSION

In 1 & 2 Thessalonians, Paul addressed several eschatological events, with a primary focus on the Day of the Lord. Much of this was based on teaching he had done previously while he was in Thessalonica in person. Paul taught that Jesus is the one who delivers from the coming wrath (1 Thessalonians 1:10) and that all who are in Jesus will escape the wrath of the Day of the Lord (1 Thessalonians 5:9-10). He will accomplish this with a global event, the Gathering Together, which will include all believers from the entire Church Age, whether they are alive at that time or already dead. His encouragement was for believers to continue living godly lives as they waited for Jesus' coming for his Church.

Learning that the Thessalonians had become convinced they had entered the Day of the Lord, contrary to his previous teaching, Paul reminded them that it was impossible for the Day of the Lord to have begun because three events must occur before the Day of the Lord can commence: the ἀποστασία, the stepping aside of the one who is restraining the man of lawlessness, and the public revelation of the man of lawlessness (2 Thessalonians 2:3, 6). Because these had clearly not yet taken place, the Thessalonians could be assured that they were not in the Day of the Lord. Apparently, this was something Paul had told them repeatedly during his short time with them (2 Thessalonians 2:5).

Paul never clarified in writing the timing of the Gathering Together in conjunction with these other events. He also did not explain what the ἀποστασία will be, beyond what he told them in person, which has led to various interpretations including apostasy in the Church, global religious rebellion by unbelievers, and the Gathering Together itself. Each interpretation has several points to support and oppose it, but we should not dogmatically assert how the ἀποστασία relates to the Church. Since the man of



lawlessness will come with Satan's power, it is certain that Satan has always had someone ready for this task. Whether the Church will know him is unclear. What is clear from Paul's earliest letters to Macedonia is that the Church cannot and will not enter the Day of the Lord or suffer any of its wrath.

APPENDIX: Translations of Key Thessalonian Passages

Following are my translations of the pertinent 1 & 2 Thessalonians passages (from the NA28) used throughout this article.

1 Thessalonians 1:9-10

"For they are reporting about us what kind of entrance we had to you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God and to wait expectantly for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus, the one who is rescuing us from the coming wrath."

1 Thessalonians 2:19-20

"For what is our hope or joy or crown of boasting – [is it] not even you – before our Lord Jesus at his coming? For you yourselves are our glory and joy."

1 Thessalonians 3:12-13

"Now may the Lord cause you to abound abundantly in love toward one another and toward everyone just as we even [have] toward you, so that your hearts may be established in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints, [amen]."

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

Now I do not wish you to be ignorant, brothers, about those who are sleeping, so that you may not grieve as the rest who do not have hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and arose, in the same way also God will bring together with him those who have fallen asleep through Jesus. For we say this to you by word of the Lord, that we who are living, being left behind, until the coming of the Lord will in no way precede those who have fallen asleep; because the Lord himself with a loud command, with an archangel's voice, and with God's trumpet will come down from heaven and the dead in Christ will arise first, then we who are living, being left behind, at the same time together with them will be taken away in clouds to a meeting of the Lord in the air; and in this way we will always be together with the Lord. So encourage one another with these words.

1 Thessalonians 5:1-11, 23

Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers, you have no need [for me] to write to you, for you yourselves know well that the day of the Lord is coming in the same way as a thief at night. Whenever they may say, "Peace and security," then sudden destruction comes on them like the birth pangs of a pregnant woman, and they will in no way escape. But you, brothers, you are not in darkness, so that the day might overtake you like a thief; for you are all sons of light and sons of day. We are neither of night nor of darkness; therefore, we should not sleep like the rest, but we should keep watch and be sober. For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, are drunk at night; but we, being of the day, we should be sober putting on the breastplate of faith

and of love and a helmet, the hope of deliverance; because God did not consign us to wrath but to obtaining of deliverance through our Lord Jesus Christ who died for us, so that whether we should keep watch or sleep we will live at the same time together with him. Wherefore, encourage one another and build up one to one, just as also you are doing.

...

Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you perfectly in every way, and keep even your whole spirit and soul and body blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

2 Thessalonians 2:1-10

Now I beg you, brothers, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together with him that you not be quickly [or "easily"] shaken away from your mind or be troubled, neither through a spirit nor through a message nor through an epistle as from us, that the Day of the Lord has come. Do not let anyone thoroughly deceive you in any way. Because . . .⁴¹ unless the ἀποστασία comes first and the man of lawlessness is revealed – the son of destruction, the one who opposes and exalts himself above all things called God or an object of worship – just as he will sit in the temple of God making himself seem that he is God. Do you not remember that when I was with you I was telling you these things? And you know the restraint now so that he will be revealed at his own time, for the mystery of lawlessness is already working; only the one who restrains now until he is taken out of the way. And then the lawless one will be revealed – whom the Lord [Jesus] will put to death by the spirit of his mouth and will abolish at the appearance of his coming – whose coming is according to the power of Satan with every miracle and signs and false wonders and in every unrighteous deceit for those who are perishing, because they did not receive the love of the truth that they would be saved.

⁴¹ There is nothing in the Greek text to fill in the first part of this sentence. A natural reading assumes that Paul meant the Day of the Lord, so most English translations insert a clarifying word or phrase: "that day" (NET, NLT, CSB, NIV, ESV, KJV) or "it" (NASB).

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THANK YOU

**FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT: DANIEL GOEPFRICH
DANIEL@THEOLOGYISFOREVERYONE.COM**