

JESUS' RETURN!

"Now, brethren, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, we ask you, not to be soon shaken in mind or troubled ..." 2 Thess 2:1-2

Paul is speaking here about two events: 1. the return of Jesus and 2. our being united with him in the air.

Jesus is first coming **for his saints** and then he is coming **with his saints!** Jesus will come first for his church and take her home, and seven years later he will come back with us to the Mount of Olives. He will then destroy the Antichrist and his armies and begin his 1000-year reign of peace on earth.

His coming for believers is the rapture. Paul describes this in **1 Thess 4:17-18: "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. Therefore comfort one another with these words."** Our comfort is that we will not have to go through the time (seven years) of tribulation. **The time of tribulation is the time of God's wrath.** It is a time of judgement for the world. People who have rejected God's love and goodness will now experience his wrath. God will give them one last chance to be saved. Many will come to faith through the wrath of God but they will then die for their faith. Jesus said that the time of tribulation would be the very worst time for the people of Israel, the worst there had ever been, and that God had limited the time to seven years, otherwise no one would be saved. The age of the church ends with the rapture of the church, then begins the seven-year time of tribulation. God has not destined his children to judgement but rather he saves them from the wrath of God. **1 Thess 1:10: "and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come."** **1 Thess 5:9: "For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ."**

Jesus said that at the end of the age God would separate the wheat from the tares: "Let both grow together until the harvest, and at the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, 'First gather together the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them, but gather the wheat into my barn'" Matt 13:30.

At the end, God will separate light and darkness, lies and truth, the genuine from the fake. The tares are burned: these are the unbelievers, who go through the fire of judgement, the time of tribulation. The wheat is gathered into the barn: these are the believers who are taken up to heaven.

Jesus names two examples in relation to the end times: 1.) Noah and 2.) Sodom and Gomorrah. Noah was "taken up" and Sodom and Gomorrah were judged. When the flood came, Noah rose in the ark and went up. After the flood, he came back down to the earth. We will be taken up and will be in heaven, and after the seven-year time of tribulation, we will come back to the earth with Jesus and reign with him for 1000 years.

Sodom and Gomorrah were judged with fire. **2 Thess 2:12: "... that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness."** That is what is in store for the devil and his followers. The lake of fire and judgement. Jesus will destroy the Antichrist with the breath of his mouth.

Paul writes in 2 Thess 2:1-12 about a) **the return of Jesus**, b) **the rapture of the church** and c) **the coming of the Antichrist**. That which is now hindering and restraining the Antichrist must first be taken away so that he can be revealed at his time. That which is restraining the Antichrist is the body of Christ. We are the light of the world and the salt of the earth. We are restraining what is evil. Light is stronger than the darkness and as long as the body of Christ is on earth, the evil one cannot come. **2 Thess 2:7-8: "For the secret power of lawlessness is already at work; but the one who now holds it back will continue to do so till he is taken out of the way. And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will overthrow with the breath of his mouth and destroy by the splendour of his coming."**

Jesus will first take his church away and then the evil one can be revealed. Following the seven-year tribulation, we will come back with Jesus to the Mount of Olives. Jesus will destroy the Antichrist and begin his 1000-year reign.

Paul writes that Jesus will not come back until 1. the "falling away" has occurred and 2. the Antichrist has come (**2 Thess 2:3**). The word translated "falling away" here is "apostasia". This word has several meanings and could also be translated as to desert, to separate, to cut off, to withdraw. At the end of time, there must first be a separation, a severance, before the Antichrist can appear. That is what Paul is referring to here and that is what is meant if you read the whole passage in context. The chaff and wheat are divided, light and darkness are separated. God first takes his children home, and then come the Antichrist and judgement. "Therefore comfort one another with these words," Paul writes (**1 Thess 4:18**). There are Christians who intend to go through the "tribulation". What kind of comfort is that? **1 Thess 5:3-4: "Sudden destruction will come upon the godless like labour pains upon a pregnant woman and they shall not escape the judgement. But we are not in darkness, so that this day should overtake us as a thief."** For we will not be here when that day comes. Jesus will first come for those who are his. He will not come like a thief. Jesus will come for his possession, his church. We belong to Jesus and Jesus will save us from the judgement, the seven-year time of tribulation. After that will come **the Day of the Lord, his visible return** on the Mount of Olives. This is the living hope we have: Jesus returning for his church.

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