

INTRODUCTION

God has a great way of humbling us. This week I had the privilege of driving my two granddaughters, Lizzie and Caroline to school. They call me Dee Dee, so when I get to hang out with them, I call it Dee Dee duty. But I always say that when I get to be with them it's a happy Dee Dee duty day.

On the way to school one morning there was a song by Katy Perry on the radio. I told them that Katy Perry had something in common with their mom. They asked, "What?" And I said, "They both are the daughters of a pastor." I thought they would be impressed with that. But then both of them said to me in unison, "What's a pastor?" So I can tell I'm really making an impression on them. Of course, I'd rather just be known as Dee Dee than their pastor.

Paul was the founding pastor of the church at Thessalonica. His main message was that Jesus was going to return. But there was a lot of confusion about what he taught. He wrote the first letter to describe exactly what happens when Jesus returns in the clouds. The dead in Christ will rise first, then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together to meet the Lord in the air.

But since that first letter, some disruptive people scared the members of the church. There were some crazy people claiming to have a prophecy from God that the Day of the Lord had already happened. Others claimed they had another letter from Paul that said Jesus had already returned. They were afraid. So Paul sent this second letter to reassure them that Jesus hadn't returned yet. In the process of correcting this mistake, he lays out God's prophetic agenda. In this passage he also introduces the evil character that the Bible calls the Antichrist.

2 Thessalonians 2:1-7. "Concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to him, we ask you, brothers, not to become easily unsettled or alarmed by some prophecy, report or letter supposed to have come from us, saying that the day of the Lord has already come. Don't let anyone deceive you in any way, for that day will not come until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the man doomed to destruction. He will oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshipped, so that he sets himself up in God's temple, proclaiming himself to be God. Don't you remember that when I was with you I used to tell you these things? And now you know what is holding him back, so that he may be revealed at the proper time. 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."

"The Day of the Lord" is mentioned 34 times in the Bible. The Day of the Lord doesn't refer to a single, 24-hour period. It is used like the expression, "We're living in the day of nuclear energy."

The Day of the Lord refers to the time when God will dramatically intervene in human history and set in motion the events of the end of the world, as we know it. We've been studying that the Day of the Lord is a series of events that begins when Jesus returns to rapture the church, and will carry all the way through the thousand-year reign of Christ on earth; it's also called the millennial reign. How can a day be a thousand years? In 2 Peter 3:8 the Bible says that with the Lord a day is like a thousand years and a thousand years is like a day.

If you're a little confused by all that, don't feel alone. So were the disciples in Thessalonica. So Paul points out there are two things that must happen before the day the Lord begins. He also gives us the key to understanding world events during this time.

I. THE CHURCH WILL BE REMOVED BEFORE THE DAY OF THE LORD

Paul began his correction by writing, "Concerning the coming our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to him." Since we've already talked at length about the rapture in 1 Thessalonians 4, just notice two important points.

A. Ignore all the phony predictions

Paul had to write to these Christians because they had been duped by false prophets, and liars. Jesus said, "If anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Christ!' or, 'There he is!' do not believe it. For false Christs and false prophets will appear...No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father." (Matthew 24:23, 36)

Jesus said we can know the season of His return, but nobody knows the exact date. He told His disciples the parable of the fig tree. He said when you see it put forth leaves, you know spring is coming. Israel is symbolized by the fig tree, and it's clear that in 1948 the fig tree put forth leaves again for the first time in over 2,000 years. That's why many of us believe we're living in the season of His return, but it is foolish to try to set a date.

In 1843, a Baptist preacher, William Miller, predicted Jesus would return on a certain date. He didn't. So he predicted a second date, and Jesus was a no-show. The remnants of his followers formed the 7th Day Adventist Church. In 1914, Charles Russell claimed Jesus would return. A few years later he identified World War I as the Battle of Armageddon. He missed it. His followers became the Jehovah's Witnesses. Of course, just a couple of years ago, Harold Camping plastered billboards and spend thousands of dollars on ads predicting Jesus would return May 21, 2011. Nope.

I agree with Warren Wiersbe who wrote: "The purpose of Bible prophecy is not for us to make a calendar, but to build character. Jesus warned us not to set dates for His coming. Date setters are usually upsetters." When anyone sets a date for the return of Christ, you can automatically mark them off as a false prophet.

B. When the church is raptured, the restraint against evil is removed

Paul wrote there is a force at work in the world that is restraining the appearance of the Antichrist. He said, "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." (2 Thessalonians 2:7) He uses the word "one who now holds back" which is a neutral pronoun, like "it." But then he writes, "Until He is taken out of the way." Most conservative scholars agree this is a reference to the Holy Spirit who lives in believers and in the church.

We live in a wicked world today. But can you imagine how wicked this world would be if suddenly there were no churches? There is moral corruption everywhere, but we're the salt of the earth. Salt was used to preserve fish and to slow down decay. Our presence in the world today is slowing down the process of moral decay. There is spiritual darkness everywhere, but we're the light of the world. Imagine the chaos and wickedness when the light is turned off.

As followers of Jesus Christ, we will not be here for the terrible time of Tribulation. Jesus is going to gather us to Himself before the Antichrist reveals himself.

II. THERE WILL BE A MORAL AND SPIRITUAL DECLINE BEFORE THE DAY OF THE LORD

Another reason the Thessalonian believers could know that the Day of the Lord hadn't come was this. He wrote, "That day will not come until the rebellion occurs." The word "rebellion" means apostasy. Throughout the history of the church, there have been periods of apostasy, but he is referring to a time when there is a great departure from truth. This will happen not only in the church, but in society as well.

We're already seeing this. Many churches are forsaking the absolute truth of the Bible. They are teaching that sinful behavior can be accepted and it should even be celebrated. We're seeing people who call themselves Christians exchanging the standard of God's Word for popular opinions and political correctness. They are teaching that the only sin today is the sin of intolerance.

When Paul wrote to Timothy, he described the moral condition of people during the last days. See if this doesn't sound like a description of our 21st century American culture. "Difficult times will come in the last days. For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, unloving, irreconcilable, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, without love for what is good, traitors, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, holding to the form of godliness but denying its power." (2 Timothy 3:1-5 HCSB)

The Bible teaches that in the last days there are going to be two parallel movements. There is going to be a mighty spiritual awakening as God pours out His Spirit on all flesh. We see that happening around the world. But right beside that, there will be an increase in wickedness and immorality. The so called-middle ground between the two is going to shrink. You are no longer going to be able to straddle the fence.

I believe we are seeing signs of this "rebellion" Paul predicted would happen before the Day of the Lord. But He said there is going to be one clear sign that the Day of the Lord has started.

III. THE REVELATION OF THE ANTICHRIST WILL SIGNAL THE DAY OF THE LORD

Paul wrote, "That day will not come until... the man of lawlessness is revealed... He will oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshipped." The phrase "man of

lawlessness" is translated "son of perdition" in some translations. Daniel calls him, "The price of the people who will come (to destroy Jerusalem). In Revelation 13, John identifies him as "a beast."

The word "antichrist" only appears four times in the Bible. It means "against Christ." John wrote, "And as you have heard, 'Antichrist (capital A) is coming,' even now many antichrists have come... This one is the antichrist: the one who denies the Father and the Son." (1 John 2:18, 22) He mentions the antichrist again in his second epistle.

After the rapture of the church, this person will be the planet's first truly global leader. Out of the chaos of the disappearance of the church, he will bring the nations of the earth together in a one-world government under a one-world economy.

In the last one hundred years, there were many individuals wrongly identified as the Antichrist. They include Franklin Delano Roosevelt, Mussolini, Hitler, Stalin, John F. Kennedy, Henry Kissinger, the Ayatollah Khomeini, Ronald Reagan, Mikhail Gorbachev, Yasser Arafat, Bill Clinton, Bill Gates, Papa Smurf and Barney the Dinosaur. It can't be Barney, because Revelation 12 talks about a great red dragon, and I'm told Barney is a magenta dinosaur.

What does the Bible predict about the Antichrist?

A. He will be a peace-maker

Daniel was the first prophet to identify the Antichrist. He wrote, "He will confirm a covenant with many for one 'seven.' In the middle of the 'seven' he will put an end to sacrifice and offering. And on a wing of the temple he will set up an abomination that causes desolation, until the end that is decreed is poured out on him." (Daniel 9:27)

In Daniel 9, the angel Gabriel gives Daniel a remarkable prophecy of a time period covering God's plan for the ages. In fact, Daniel predicted WHEN the Messiah would be born. We're going to be examining that prophecy in detail in a couple of weeks in WEBS as we study Convincing Truth: The Jesus Prophecies.

But Daniel mentions a final seven-year period, which we call the Great Tribulation. At the beginning of this seven-year period, the Antichrist will broker a peace treaty, but in the middle of the seven-year period, he will break the treaty.

Can you imagine how popular a world leader would be if he could successfully bring about a peace treaty between Israel and the Arab world? Or how a religious leader who could bring together all the Christians, Muslims, Jews, and Buddhists? He would win the Nobel Peace Prize and be *Time Magazine's* Man of the Year for sure!

The Antichrist could be a Muslim leader who appears to be moderate. Just this week the new President of Iran, Hassan Rouhani spoke at the U.N. He delivered this message to Americans. He spoke in English: "I would like to say to American people: I bring peace and friendship from Iranians to Americans." He also claimed Iran isn't interested in developing a nuclear weapon.

Wow. That makes me feel a lot better. And since Ambassador Dennis Rodman is taking care of North Korea, we're about to enter a period of world peace. If you believe that, you believe professional wrestling is real and Elvis is still alive.

B. He will be a peace-breaker

Jesus said, "Therefore when you see the 'abomination of desolation,' spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place" (whoever reads, let him understand)...For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until this time, no, nor ever shall be." (Matthew 24:15, 21 NKJV)

We call this period the Tribulation because that's what Jesus called it. Paul mentions this man of lawlessness as the one who will set himself up in the God's Temple, demanding that he be worshipped. What an abomination! Now obviously, this can't happen today, because there is no Jewish Temple. In the place where the Jewish Temple stood, there is the golden dome of the Rock, the third most holy place in Islam.

But the Dome of the Rock doesn't sit *exactly* where the Temple was. It's about 100 feet south of the spot. You only have to Google image any model of the Jewish Temple and see that the Temple was directly west of the Eastern Gate. Then Google image the current Temple mount and you can see the dome of the rock doesn't sit on that spot.

Most Orthodox Jews, and many Christians believe the third temple will be built. In fact, all the articles and implements of the Temple have been manufactured according to the specifications of Leviticus, and Jews with the last name of Cohen have been trained as priests. All they're waiting on is the Temple to be built. Or it could be a Tabernacle, like Moses built. The Jewish Tabernacle wasn't large. The canvas fence around it was 150 by 75 feet. But the actual tent containing the holy place and the Holy of Holies was 45 feet long and only 15 feet wide. Those dimensions didn't change when they build larger walls and buildings around it. Think about it, 15 feet by 45 feet—that's about half the size of singlewide mobile home! So most of us live in houses larger than the actual interior of the Temple.

So just imagine part of this peace treaty this world leader launches is permission for the Jews to set up their tabernacle beside the Dome of the Rock. How long would it take for them to construct that? A month? I'm not saying that's going to happen, but there is room for both to be there. However it happens, we know there will be a Jewish Temple or tabernacle during the Tribulation.

C. He will be a persecutor

The Bible says, "A mouth was given to him to speak boasts and blasphemies. He was also given authority to act for 42 months." That's three and a half years, or in the middle of the seven years as Daniel wrote. "He began to speak blasphemies against God: to blaspheme His name and His dwelling—those who dwell in heaven. And he was permitted to wage war against the saints and to conquer them." (Revelation 13:5-7 HCSB)

People ask if there will be Christians during the Tribulation. I don't call them Christians, because the Bible doesn't call them that. They're called "saints." We can call them tribulation saints. There will be thousands and perhaps millions of people who will put their faith in Jesus during the Tribulation. In fact, in Revelation 7 we learn there will be 144,000 Jewish evangelists who will spread out across the world and preach. In Revelation 14 they are identified as being redeemed. But the cost of following Christ during the Tribulation will be higher than we can imagine. The Antichrist and his forces will torture and kill most of these saints. They are the ones who will not take the mark of the beast, so they won't even be allowed to shop for food. He will be the most brutal persecutor of believers in all of history.

CONCLUSION

So what is our take away truth? Don't be disturbed by chaotic world events, God is in control! Notice again the first thing Paul wrote in this chapter. "Concerning the coming our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to him, we ask you brothers, not to become easily unsettled or alarmed." (2 Thessalonians 2:1) Whenever Paul wrote about the second coming He always told them to "encourage one another." He's encouraging us not be unsettled or alarmed.

Paul wrote this letter around 54 A.D., and it was a time of great upheaval in the Roman Empire. Claudius had been the Emperor and had kicked all the Jews and Christians out of Italy, so the great persecution was just beginning. In October of 54 A.D., Claudius died from poisoned mushrooms served him by his fourth wife, Agrippina, who was also his niece. And she immediately placed her 17-year-old son on the throne. His name was Nero. Over the next fifteen years, he would brutally kill thousands of Christians. Those were scary times. But Paul told them not to be unsettled or alarmed.

That's good advice for us today as well. The word "unsettled" describes a ship that is tossed in the middle of stormy sea. Do you ever feel a little unsettled when you watch the news or read the newspaper? Because we have instant access to international news, we are aware of more chaotic events around the world. A couple of weeks ago, two Muslim suicide bombers attacked the worshippers at All Saints Anglican Church in Peshawar, Pakistan. 85 Christians were killed and over 100 were wounded, the most brutal attack on Christians in Pakistani history. In Egypt, the Muslim Brotherhood has been burning churches and killing Christians. In Syria, radical Muslims have infiltrated the rebel forces and have been destroying churches and attacking Christians.

And we all know about the terrible attack at the mall in Kenya. Radical Muslims went through killing all non-Muslims. The terrorists asked shoppers if they could give the name of Mohammed's mother. If they were unable, they were shot on the spot. And the death toll is over 70.

In light of world events, it would be easy for us to be unsettled or alarmed. But over and over again, the Bible tells us God is in control. I love the second Psalm, because the Psalmist is obviously frustrated and upset. He asks, "Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing?" (Psalm 2:1 KJV). Have you ever wondered that after watching the news? Doesn't it seem like the people on this planet are enraged and there are things happening that seem to be worse than we can imagine? Here's the answer the Psalmist gives. "The One enthroned in

heaven laughs. He rebukes them in His anger.” (Psalms 2:4) That means God is scoffing at the raging of the nations. While we’re wringing our hands and worrying about world events, do you know what God is doing? He’s chuckling. He’s totally in charge. He isn’t worried. In heaven there is no panic, only plans.

So, as our passage says, don’t be unsettled or alarmed by what’s happening in the world. God is in control. Here’s God’s Word to people living in a troubled world. He says, “I am God, and there is none like me. I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come. I say: ‘My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please.’” (Isaiah 46:9-10)

Prophecy is history in reverse. God already knows the ending, and His purpose will stand.

When we were kids we sang a song that contains great theology: “He’s got the whole world in His hands. He’s got the whole wide world in His hands. He’s got the whole world in His hands. He’s got the whole world in His hands.”

Jesus said in John 10 that if you belong to God, no man can pluck you out of the Father’s Hand. So even when you think you might be losing your grip, don’t worry. God’s got you in His loving hands, and no force on heaven or earth, or under the earth can separate you from His hands!

OUTLINE

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- A. Ignore all the phony predictions
- B. When the church is raptured, the restraint against evil is removed

"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." *2 Thessalonians 2:7*

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"Difficult times will come in the last days. For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, unloving, irreconcilable, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, without love for what is good, traitors, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, holding to the form of godliness but denying its power." *2 Timothy 3:1-5 HCSB*

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He will be a

- A. Peace-maker
- B. Peace-breaker
- C. Persecutor

TAKE-AWAY TRUTH:

DON'T BE DISTURBED BY CHAOTIC WORLD EVENTS, GOD IS IN CONTROL!

"Concerning the coming our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to him, we ask you brothers, not to become easily unsettled or alarmed." *2 Thessalonians 2:1*

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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes