

Day 64, 2 Thessalonians 2

by David Servant

The rapture of the church will occur during the day of the Lord, and the antichrist will be revealed after the apostasy takes place.

Scripture: Matthew 24:9

Topics: "End Times", "Antichrist"

Description

David Servant delves into the topic of the rapture and the revelation of the antichrist, emphasizing the connection between the two events as outlined in 1 Thessalonians 4-5 and Matthew 24:29-31. He discusses the apostasy foretold by Jesus and Paul, highlighting the betrayal and persecution that will occur among professing Christians. The debate over the temple of God, whether literal or figurative, and the role of the church as the restrainer of the antichrist are explored, leading to a conclusion that God ultimately restrains evil. Servant also addresses the delusion orchestrated by the antichrist, emphasizing God's sovereignty in saving those who believe in the truth.

Transcript

If you've always heard that believers will be raptured well before the antichrist is revealed, you now know that what you've always heard has been wrong. Just as we learned in 1 Thessalonians 4-5 and in Matthew 24:29-31, today's reading again affirms that the rapture of the church will occur during "the day of the Lord" (2:1-2). Moreover, Paul explicitly states that Jesus will not come, and we will not be "gathered together to Him," until the "apostasy" takes place and the antichrist is revealed (2:3-4). It couldn't be more clear.

What is the "apostasy" of which Paul wrote? To apostatize is to renounce one's belief. Remember that Jesus foretold of an apostasy prior to His return:

Then they will deliver you to tribulation, and will kill you, and you will be hated by all nations on account of My name. And at that time many will fall away and will deliver up one another and hate one another (Matt. 24:9-10).

Under intense global persecution and the threat of death, many professing Christians will apostatize. Worse, those who do apostatize will betray those who don't. Apostates will be handing over church membership directories to the authorities. Sheep who attended goat churches will surely regret it then!

Paul wrote that the antichrist would take "his seat in the temple of God, displaying Himself as being God" (2:4). When Paul penned those words, the temple in Jerusalem was still standing. It was destroyed in 70 A.D. by the Romans, however, and has never been rebuilt. Yet, because many Jews in modern Israel hope to see the temple rebuilt, and because of what Paul wrote about the antichrist taking his seat in the temple of God, many Christians believe that the Jerusalem temple will be rebuilt.

Others, however, take a more figurative interpretation of Paul's words, thinking that the temple of which Paul wrote is the church, as he did in other places (see 1 Cor. 3:16-17; 2 Cor. 6:16). They maintain that the antichrist will "take his seat in the temple of God" by becoming a central figure in the apostate church, and that he will lead the global persecution against true believers, and thus we should not anticipate the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem. However, if the temple of which Paul wrote in 2:4 is the true church and the antichrist is a central figure in the apostate church, it can hardly be said that he "takes his seat in the temple of God" (2:4). So I still think the temple will be rebuilt in Jerusalem.

There are other debates as well. Some say that the "restrainer" of 2:6-7---who restrains the antichrist "so that in his time he may be revealed"---is also the church, interpreting 2:7b to say, "The church that now restrains the antichrist from being revealed will continue to restrain the antichrist until the church is taken away at the rapture." That interpretation, however, flatly contradicts Paul's previous words about the rapture not occurring until after the antichrist is revealed (2:1-3). Also, I wonder how the church has restrained the antichrist for 2,000 years, especially since the antichrist obviously was not even alive for at least 1,950 of those years!

All of that being so, I think the one who restrains the antichrist must be God, and I suspect that the first "he" of 2:7 refers to Him, and the second "he" of 2:7 refers to the antichrist, whom God will "take out of the way" when Jesus returns, just as Paul describes in the very next verse (see 2:8).

The antichrist will be empowered by Satan to perform signs and false wonders, but he will not be outside the control of God. In fact, Paul tells us that the antichrist will help to fulfill God's plan to delude those who have already rejected the truth (2:11). Note that they are not people whom God sovereignly willed from eternity past to be deceived. Rather, they are people whom God gave opportunity to be saved yet who "did not believe the truth, but took pleasure in wickedness" (2:12). God has, however, "chosen...from the beginning" to save those who would have "faith in the truth" (2:13).

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