

Rapture and Retribution

Week 24: June 11-17 – 1 Thess. 5; 2 Thess. 1-3; Acts 18

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Helpful Resources

Map of Paul's Missionary Journeys (p.59), Order of End Time Events (p.73)

Making Sense of It All

- The Big Picture

While on his second missionary journey, the Apostle Paul wrote two letters to the Thessalonians. Last week, we reviewed the first four chapters of his first letter. This week, we finished the first letter, and we read and completed the second letter as well. The primary purpose of the second letter to the Thessalonians was to answer questions sparked by Paul's first letter, particularly related to the end times. Though Paul did not provide many details, he gave us enough to know that there will be some big events in the last days. In this review, we will reconsider end times events, as well as what we should be doing until then.

- End Times Events

The Greek word *eschatos* means "last or end," so eschatology is a study of the last days of mankind's existence as we know it. Though Paul didn't mention everything that would happen in the end times, he did spotlight a few big events.

1. **The Rapture** (1 Thess. 4:13-18): The word *rapture* means to be caught up or snatched away. At some point in the future, Jesus will come back to gather His followers, dead and alive, to meet Him in the air. They will forever be with Him. Those who are asleep (the dead) will rise first. There are differing views as to whether the Rapture is the same event as the Second Coming of Jesus or a separate event. There are also differing views as to the timing of the Rapture — before, during, or after the Great Tribulation that is to come.
2. **The Day of the Lord** (1 Thess. 5:1-11; 2 Thess. 1:1-12): The Day of the Lord is a collective term that includes multiple events that take place in the end times, such as the pouring out of God's wrath on the earth and unbelievers, the end of the Tribulation, the return of Christ, and more. Included in the Day of the Lord would be judgment or retribution for unbelievers. Retribution is defined as repayment, compensation, or the distribution of punishments for actions. Every person will give an account of his life to the Lord (Matt. 12:36; Rom. 14:12; Heb. 4:13; 1 Pet. 4:5).
3. **The Man of Lawlessness** (2 Thess. 2:1-17): Before the Day of the Lord, Paul said there would be a general apostasy or rebellion against God. The apostasy would lead to the rise of the Man of Lawlessness or Anti-Christ. Though there are many antichrists, this man will be a global leader who will have the power of Satan and the worship of the world. Through wonders, the Anti-Christ will "earn" the praises of mankind (religion), the control of world government, as well as the global economy. He will forge a temporary peace between Israel and its enemies, which he will violate by defaming the rebuilt Temple, sitting on the earthly throne of God (referring to the Ark of the Covenant), and waging war against God's people. However, even this evil dictator will meet his end when Jesus returns to make all things new.

- But, Until Then?

While there are other aspects of the end times (i.e., the Great Tribulation, the destruction of the earth, etc.), we will study those later when we read the book of *Revelation*. For now, Paul piqued the curiosity of the Thessalonians with the limited information he provided. Big events are coming, so then what are we to do in the meantime? Here are four suggestions:

1. **Comfort One Another** (*1 Thess. 4:18; 2 Thess. 2:13-17*): Paul did not share all these things about the end times to depress his readers. Rather he said, "Comfort one another with these words." Despite all that is happening, there will be a day when justice will be served, when the forces of darkness will be destroyed, and when we will get to see and be with Jesus and our loved ones again. Be encouraged, not discouraged!
2. **Live in Peace** (*1 Thess. 5:12-28*): While waiting for Jesus is difficult and living in this crazy world is chaotic and stressful, we are not only to be a peace (see #1), but we are also to be peacemakers. Not only should we strive to be at peace with the world, but we must also do the more difficult task, which is to be at peace with other believers.
3. **Work Hard** (*2 Thess. 3:1-18*): While we wait for Jesus, we cannot afford to become lazy. Remember, work is a gift of God and another way to glorify Him. We must not become dependent on others, but rather we must be independent, self-sustaining (as much as we can be), and ready to share to meet the needs of those who cannot work.
4. **Propagate the Gospel** (*Acts 18:1-22*): Though Paul knew and informed Christians about future events, he did not waste time waiting for them to happen. Instead, he provided a good example for us all. He continued traveling as much as he could to tell others about Jesus. He knew that God had more people to be saved, and he desired to be used of Him to take the gospel to whom He willed. Let us not toil in vain but for the Lord.

The Bottom Line

We must be faithful to do the Lord's work until He decides to bring about the rapture and retribution.

Questions to Consider

1. Review the "Order of End Times Events" chart. Which view were you taught growing up? Which view do you espouse today? Could you explain why if someone asked?
2. Take a minute to imagine the Rapture. Think about yourself, your loved ones, your neighbors, co-workers, and friends. Who will be there with you? Who won't be there?
3. Predict the fallout after hundreds of millions of people instantly vanish. What would the media or the government say? What kind of chaos would ensue? What kind of world would be left behind? How could the Rapture lead to other end times events?
4. If the Rapture happened today, wouldn't that mean that the Anti-Christ is already alive? Satan doesn't know when the Rapture will occur, so he's prepared now. Who on the earth today would have the attention and affection of the world in a time of global catastrophe?
5. Do the end times intrigue you, or would you rather not talk about them? Explain.
6. What about Paul's end times descriptions encourage you most?
7. How did you score on your evaluation of Paul's peacemaking suggestions? In what ways do you need to improve?
8. What are your healthy and unhealthy views of work?
9. Take time to pray about how God might use you to reach the lost in your workplace, club, school, neighborhood, city, state, nation, or around the world for Christ.