

Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, 2 that you not be quickly shaken from your composure or be disturbed either by a spirit or a message or a letter as if from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come. 3 Let no one in any way deceive you, for it will not come unless the apostasy comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, 4 who opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as being God. NASU

A. 1 Now we request you, brethren, with regard to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him 2 that you not be quickly shaken from your composure or be disturbed either by a spirit or a message or a letter as if from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come. 3 Let no one in any way deceive you, for it will not come unless the apostasy comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed. - Paul now goes on to further clarify matters of the Second Coming, the timing of the rapture, and also of the person of the Antichrist, his deceptive work and his destruction. This discussion is made up of the text of **2 Thessalonians 2:1-12**. After having described the Second Coming in terms of Christ's "**retribution**" on unbelievers and also the day of glorification of the saints (2 Thess 1:7-10), he will now describe the timing of the rapture, "**the day of the Lord**," and the revelation of "**the man of lawlessness**." When he says "Now we request of you brethren," his request is directed toward the phrase "**that you not be quickly shaken from your composure or be disturbed**." (v-2). He is comforting them by correcting an obvious misunderstanding that they have. They were under the impression that "**the day of the Lord has come**." It is assumed that someone had written a false letter, or at least had given a message of some sort, that was a counterfeit message from the apostles explaining that they were now in the "**day of the Lord**." This is obvious from the statement "**or be disturbed either by a spirit or a message or a letter as if from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come**." They obviously thought that their severe persecution was a result of the terrible events Paul had described to them as "**the day of the Lord**." Here Paul writes to correct them and tell them that the "**day of the Lord**" has NOT come, and that it won't come until "**the apostasy comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed**." (v-3). So Paul clearly corrects them and in so doing also addresses some matters of the Second Coming, including the timing of the rapture, the great end time apostasy and also of the revelation of person of the Antichrist.

In Paul's mind "**the coming of our Lord Jesus**" is an event which inaugurates the unfolding of a sequence of several events spoken of in scripture. The events include...

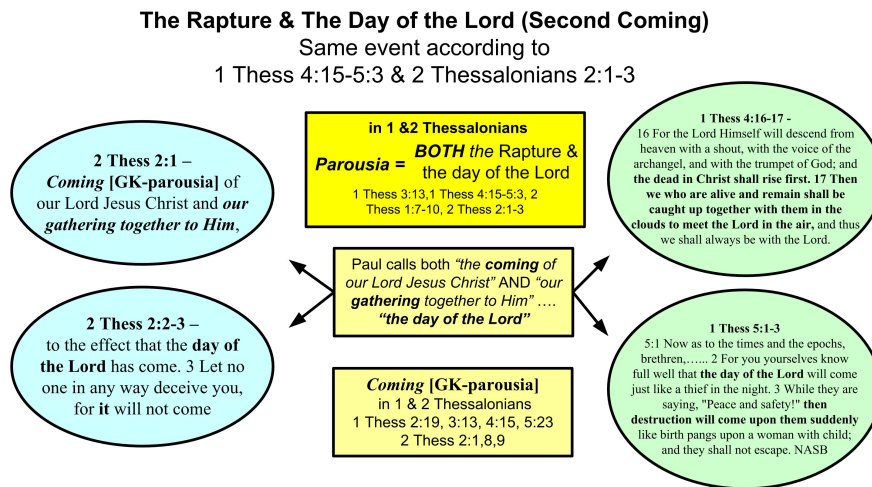
- the "**gathering together with Him**" we call the **rapture** spoken of by Paul in 1 Thess 4:16-17 and 2 Thess 2:1
- the "**day of the Lord**" spoken of by Paul both in 1 Thess 5:3 and 2 Thess 2:2
- the "**retribution**" of Christ upon the unbelievers and the Antichrist spoken of by Paul in 2 Thess 1:7-9 and 2 Thess 2:8

Additionally, Paul had instructed the Thessalonians to wait for and expect this event as....

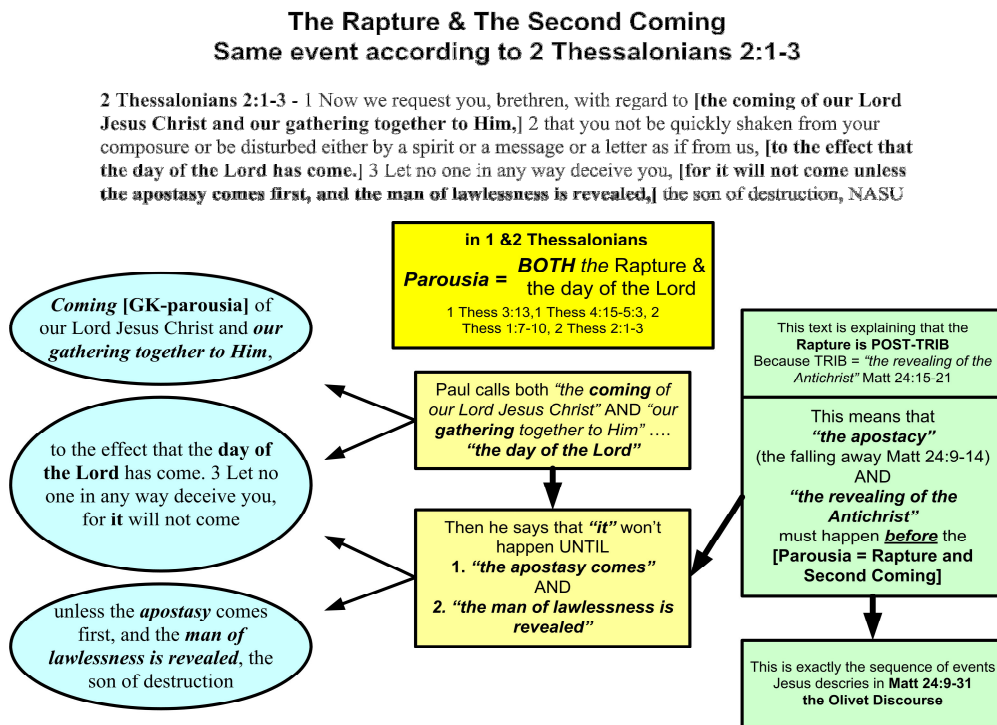
- the **great day of their deliverance and joy** together with Paul and all the saints in 1Thess 1:9, 1 Thess 2:19, 1 Thess 3:13, and 2 Thess 1:10
- their **reuniting with their loved ones** who had "fallen asleep" (died) 1 Thess 4:15-18
- the **destruction of their persecutors** in 1 Thess 5:1-3, 2 Thess 1:6-10

All of the things are one and the same event, if you will, in Paul's mind when speaking of the "**coming**" [parousia] of the Lord Jesus Christ. So we could say with Paul, when Jesus comes He will destroy His enemies, OR He will rapture the church, OR we will be reunited with our loved ones who have died, OR it will be a day of great joy together with all the saints, etc., etc. In fact there are several places in the text where Paul equates these events as being one in the same. Paul had equated these two events (day of the Lord and rapture) back in 1 Thessalonians 4:16-

5:3, and does it again in 2 Thessalonians 2:1-3. The below chart depicts this as well.



Our current text in 2 Thessalonians 2:1-3 is a definitive place where he does this. The below chart depicts this idea where he equates *“the day of the Lord”* together with *“our being gathered together with Him,”* which we call the rapture.



But this brings with it a very specific understanding then in regard to the timing of the rapture, because Paul then describes *“with regard to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him,”* that this *“will not come unless the apostasy comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed.”* If you will, Paul is explaining that the rapture then, (*“our being gathered to Him”*) is an event which takes place AFTER the Antichrist is revealed. Because we know from the text of the Olivet Discourse (Matt 24:15-31), Daniel chapters 7-9,11-12, and also Revelation 13, that the Great Tribulation period IS those events which surround the coming of

the Antichrist to power and the destruction done by him. Therefore, the rapture is a **POST-Tribulation** event. This is very clear from an understanding of these texts. Further, all the events which make up the Second Coming, are summed up here by Paul as *“the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him,”* and also, *“the day of the Lord,”* are spoken of as POST-Tribulation events. These things, says Paul, *“will not come unless the apostasy comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed.”* John Piper comments on this in his morning sermon of 8-30-87. <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/articles/definitions-and-observations-concerning-the-second-coming-of-christ> *“If Paul were a pre-tribulationist why did he not simply say in 2 Thessalonians 2:3 that the Christians don't need to worry that the day of the Lord is here because all the Christians are still here? Instead he talks just the way you would expect a post-tribulationist person to do. He tells them that they should not think that the day of the Lord is here because the apostasy and the man of lawlessness have not appeared.”* I would like to add at this point that Paul could have said many **PRE-tribulationist** things that make **PRE-trib** doctrine very clear. An example would be in 1 Thess 5:4 Paul could have simply said, *“that day will not overtake you as thief”* because you will have been caught up (raptured) 7 years earlier. Or he could have said in reference to the rapture in 1 Thess 4:16-17 that this happens before the man of lawlessness is revealed OR 7 years before the Second Coming of Christ. But no such statement exist in the entire Bible, and surely not in Pauline eschatology.

But also note, Paul *sequence* of events outlined here in 2 Thessalonians 2:1-3. This is exactly the sequence of events outlined by Jesus in the Olivet Discourse. In Matthew 24:9-31, Jesus shows this progression of events. There he says that persecution and apostasy will abound and many people will “fall away.”

Matthew 24:8-13 - 9 "Then they will deliver you to tribulation, and will kill you, and you will be hated by all nations on account of My name. 10 "And at that time many will fall away and will deliver up one another and hate one another. 11 "And many false prophets will arise, and will mislead many. 12 "And because lawlessness is increased, most people's love will grow cold. 13 "But the one who endures to the end, he shall be saved. NASB

It is at this time that the Gospel testimony to the nations will reach its highest level in all of the church age.

Matthew 24:14 - 14 "And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world for a witness to all the nations, and then the end shall come. NASB

Jesus then describes that during this time of persecution and apostasy, that the Antichrist will rise to power, with great deception and signs and wonders, and he describes this as a *“great tribulation, such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever shall.”* Note, the wrath of God is not included in these events, but only Antichrist’s evil works.

Matthew 24:21 - 21 a great tribulation, such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever shall. NASB

Jesus then tells us that that this *“great tribulation”* will be *“cut short for the sake of God’s elect”* people, who are under severe persecution, which is also pictured in Revelation chapter 13.

Matthew 24:22 - 22 "And unless those days had been cut short, no life would have been saved; but for the sake of the elect those days shall be cut short. NASB

He then describes this cutting short of the *“great tribulation”* by *“the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to Him,”* which he says is *“immediately after the tribulation.”*

Matthew 24:29-31 - 29 "But immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from the sky, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken, 30 and then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky with power and great glory. 31 "And He will send forth His angels with a great trumpet and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other. NASB

Notice how consistent Jesus sequence is with Paul’s sequence in 2 Thessalonians 2:1-3. Paul

says that *“the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him,”* won’t happen **until** 1) the apostasy comes and 2) the Antichrist is revealed. This is clear when he says, *“will not come unless the apostasy comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed,”* and that is the exact sequence Jesus describes above. The below chart depicts this sequence of events in the Olivet Discourse.

Chronology of Events in the Olivet Discourse in Matthew 24



Now concerning this timing of the rapture and second coming, Paul is very concerned that the Thessalonians not be deceived. This is the point of his text, to correct them on their understanding of this timing. *“Let no one in any way deceive you,”* about this important fact, *“for it will not come unless the apostasy comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction.”* Paul considered it of utmost importance for them to know that their *“gathering together with Him”* would not happen *“unless the apostasy comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed.”* This was also a great concern to Jesus. When he was asked by his disciples about what would be the sign of His coming and the end of the age, He replied, *“see to it that no one misleads you.”* About what? About *“when will these things be, and what will be the sign of your coming, and the end of the age.”*

Matthew 24:3-4 - 3 And as He was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately, saying, "Tell us, **when will these things be, and what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?"** 4 And Jesus answered and said to them, **"See to it that no one misleads you."** NASB

Tension between 1 & 2 Thessalonians concerning Imminency

At this point I should also like to deal with Imminency and the tension between 1 and 2 Thessalonians concerning Imminency. See Beale pg 29.... While 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11 affirms that Christ’s coming will occur at an *unexpected* time, 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12 says that **definite signs** will appear before Christ returns. Note also, that this tension between unexpectedness and signs preceding Christ return exists in the Gospels, including in the Olivet Discourse of our Lord. Throughout Scripture we are told of the certain and imminent return of Christ, and yet we are given **signs that will precede His coming** in vivid detail and accompanying order of events leading up to His return. This tension however is easily resolved by an examination of these passages and a clear understanding of the intent and scope of the doctrine of Imminency. In short, no one knows the exact day or hour that Christ will return (Matthew 24:36, 44, Mark 13:32), but Christians are told the season of His coming will be something they can clearly identify by the signs and events leading up to it (Matthew 24:14-15, 21-22, 25, 29-31, Mark 13:10, 14, 19-20, 23-27), signs and events that will be deceptively unclear to an unbelieving world (Matt 24:37-44, Luke 21:34-36, 1 Thess 5:2-4). So **when we speak about Imminency, it is not entirely accurate to say that Jesus can come at any moment**, but rather that His coming is in fact certain and that when He comes it will be a time of great deception.