

The Case of the Missing Saints
(A Biblical Investigation into the Mystery of the Rapture)
Rockey Jackson - November 24, 1999
Section 5 of 13

“Do you not remember...?”

Paul believed that the Thessalonians already knew everything they needed to know about the Rapture. Fortunately for us, however, he was soon to find out that they would need another reminder concerning the timing of the Rapture. Apparently, they had been told by sources other than the Apostle Paul that the day of the Lord had already come and gone. In Second Thessalonians 2:2, Paul notes three sources of this misinformation: by spirit, by word, and by letter. Paul refutes these worries by reminding the Thessalonians of something he had already taught them while he was with them. He writes in 2 Thess. 2:3, “Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition.” The passage then tells us that this man of sin and lawlessness will oppose God and exalt himself above God. He will even place his own throne in God’s temple and proclaim that he is God. This event has come to be known as the Desolating Sacrilege. Paul reminds the Thessalonians that he had taught them these things and that they knew what was restraining the man of sin so that he would be revealed at the appointed time. The passage ends with the assurance that the Lord will destroy the lawless one when he returns.

- 1** Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him,
- 2** That ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand.
- 3** Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition;
- 4** Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God.
- 5** Remember ye not, that, when I was yet with you, I told you these things?
- 6** And now ye know what withholdeth that he might be revealed in his time.
- 7** For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way.
- 8** And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming (2 Thess. 2:1-8).

It is apparent that 2 Thess. 2:1-8 is referring to the Rapture, the same event that we just looked at in 1 Thess. 4:13-5:11. There are three specific phrases used in each passage that show they are tightly connected to each other. The first phrase is “the coming of the Lord” in 1 Thess. 4:15 and “the coming of our Lord” in 2 Thess. 2:1. Secondly, the scripture in 1 Thess. 4:17 says, “we ... shall be caught up ... to meet the Lord” and 2 Thess. 2:1 tells of “our gathering together unto him.” The third phrase is “the day of the Lord” in 1 Thess. 5:2 and “the day of Christ” in 2 Thess. 2:2.

The Case of the Missing Saints - Remember

From this passage, we can see that the Rapture will not occur “except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed” by installing himself as God in the temple. This man of sin is commonly referred to as the Antichrist and his desecration of God’s temple is known as the Desolating Sacrilege. It was described by Daniel the prophet in Dan. 11:29-39, by our Lord Jesus Christ in Matt. 24:15 and Mark 13:14, and by John the Apostle in Rev. 13:1-18.

There has already been one and quite possibly two fulfillments of these prophecies. The Hellenistic king Antiochus IV Epiphanes of the Seleucid dynasty in Syria conquered Jerusalem in 168 B.C. When he conquered the city he had a pig sacrificed on God’s alter in the temple. This is the archetype of the Desolating Sacrilege and led to the Maccabean revolt. The second possible fulfillment would be when Jerusalem and the Second Temple were destroyed by the Roman general (and later Emperor) Titus Vespasianus in 70 A.D. There are differences of opinion about whether or not these are the actual fulfillment of the prophecies in Daniel and the gospels. There are also differences of opinion on whether or not these prophecies will have a double fulfillment. I will not be able to solve those issues in this article. All I will note is that the Rapture has not yet occurred and there is still the prophecy in Revelation 13:1-18 of yet another occurrence of the Desolating Sacrilege to come in the time of the Apocalypse.

We should not be deceived into believing the rapture has already occurred or that the day of the Lord has passed before this very obvious event takes place. This is a real event that has been literally fulfilled once and possibly twice before. It’s not a mystical event occurring in some spiritual sense. We should not be deceived into equating the physical temple of God that will be desecrated with the spiritual temples of the Holy Spirit, our bodies. The Desolating Sacrilege is an actual event that was revealed by the prophecies of Daniel and John. Our Lord Jesus Christ authenticated their words by his own testimony as referenced previously.

According to this passage, the Thessalonians knew what and who was restraining the man of lawlessness from coming before his appointed time. Unfortunately for us, however, we are not given that information in this passage and I have never found even the suggestion of another Biblical reference that would provide these facts. Without a scripture reference, any suggested restraint for the man of sin is no more than the conjecture of man.

Casebook Notes:

Who? - Our Lord Jesus Christ, 2 Thess. 2:1.

What? - All living believers will be gathered to meet the Lord, 2 Thess. 2:1.

When? - At the coming of the Lord, 2 Thess. 2:1.

- After the Desolating Sacrilege, 2 Thess. 2:3,4.