

JWB

The Meeting in The Air

Radio Sermons



by
Wayne Carver

Contents

Chapter	Page
1. The Black Cloud With a Silver Lining	1
2. "I Would Not Have You Ignorant"	3
3. The Oriental Wedding	5
4. The Three Sounds	7
5. Sudden Destruction Upon the World	12
6. Paul's Second Declaration	15
7. A "Pre-Tribulational" Rapture	17
8. "The Departure"	20
9. The Revelation of the Man of Sin	23
10. The Bridegroom Cometh	25

1.

The Black Cloud With a Silver Lining

“For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ.” Titus 2:11-13.

Every “black cloud” of judgment that comes from God has its “silver lining” for those who know Him and walk in His ways. Terrible spiritual and moral bankruptcy has spread over the world in just a few decades. Even our own nation, which was founded upon a belief in God and originally governed by Biblical standards, has experienced a terrible nose dive into moral decadence. God’s Word shows that a continued course in this direction can only result in judgment from God Himself.

There seems to be no room to doubt that the world is on the threshold of that seven-year period of turmoil and judgment that Scripture refers to as “the tribulation.” But perhaps you’re wondering, “How can a Christian find a ‘silver lining’ in this ‘black cloud’ of impending judgment?” How can a Christian rejoice when he knows that these terrible judgments are going to bring horrible suffering and death to a major part of the earth’s population? There’s no joy in these things. Even though the precious promise of the Lord’s return to earth at the end of these times would sustain the believer, the prospect of having to go through even a part of the tribulation would fill anyone with dread and foreboding.

The "silver lining" in this "black cloud" of coming judgment is that the Lord has promised to come for His church, His bride, *before* these horrible events fall on the earth!

The Apostle Paul said, "For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation (that is, 'saving' from that wrath) by our Lord Jesus Christ." I Thess. 5:9. The wrath that God is to bring upon the earth is to be *preceded* by the rapture of the church.

The rapture is that event which the members of the church have anticipated since the first century. Paul referred to this event as "that blessed hope" in Titus 2:13. And that is exactly what it is, a blessed hope.

The rapture of the church is the fulfillment of the promise that our Lord made to His own that evening when they sat together in the upper room, just before the day of our Lord's crucifixion. He said, "*In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go to prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.*" John 14:2-3.

Our blessed Lord has promised that He would return and on that return He would make us His eternal bride. Many of our day say that He is gone forever. They say, "Where is the promise of His coming?" II Peter 3:4. They say that here on this earth we will never see Him again. But His last word was, "Surely, I come quickly." Rev. 22:20.

2.

“I Would Not Have You Ignorant”

“But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him.” 1 Thess. 4:13-14.

Let's recall the background of this passage. The Apostle Paul was with the Thessalonian Christians for only a short time after he founded the church. During that time he taught them a great many truths of the Word of God, one of which was that of the imminent coming of the Lord Jesus Christ to take His church out of this world. The Thessalonians had taken hold of this precious truth, and they were living in daily expectation of His appearing.

But a problem arose after Paul's departure. Some of the brethren of this new church had died. The remaining members of the church could not understand this, for they had erroneously believed that Christ would return for the church before death overtook any of them. So they sent a message to the Apostle Paul and asked him just what would happen at the time of the Lord's appearing.

The Dead in Christ Will Rise

Notice the points that Paul emphasized here in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-14. First, Christians are not to be ignorant, or lacking in knowledge, concerning the state of those who die in Christ; and because of this knowledge they are not to sorrow for a dead Christian loved one. Second, the sign given when Jesus died and rose again is the absolute proof that in God's own time these loved

ones are also to rise again. Third, when God in the Person of Jesus Christ comes from heaven to receive His church He will bring with Him all those who have died knowing Him as personal Saviour during this age of grace.

This statement of verse 14 is an absolute refutation of the so-called doctrine of soul sleep. The only way Christ could bring the dead Christians with Him is if they already are present with Him in heaven before the time of this resurrection. Paul referred to the body only and not to the soul and spirit (the real person) when he used the expression "asleep." Throughout his writings, Paul always used the word "sleep" to refer to those who have suffered physical death after knowing Christ as their Saviour. He referred to those who died outside of Christ as being "dead" and to those who died in Christ as being "asleep."

In Biblical usage "death" means "separation." Physical death is separation of soul and spirit from the body. Spiritual death is the separation of the soul, spirit and body from God. When a person dies in Christ, his soul and spirit are separated from the body, and the body goes into a state of "sleep." But this term refers to the body only, not to the soul and spirit. The soul and spirit of the dead in Christ are very much conscious, and the real person is in the presence of Christ immediately at the moment of death. But when a person dies out of Christ, although his body is also "asleep," that one's soul and spirit are imprisoned in Hades, awaiting the resurrection of the wicked dead and the judgment to follow. There is no hope of that one ever living in the presence of God. He is eternally separated from God; he is "dead" in the most dreaded significance of the term.

Paul said that there was no reason to sorrow over those who have gone on to be with the Lord. *"For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also*

which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him." If Christians believe this (and they do), then they can be absolutely sure that the Lord Jesus Christ will bring the souls and spirits of the Christian dead with Him when He comes for His church.

"By the Word of the Lord"

In I Thessalonians 4:15, the Apostle Paul assured his readers that the information he was giving came by direct revelation from the Lord Himself. "For this I say unto you by the word of the Lord." Then Paul provided a direct answer to the question that had been brought up by the Thessalonian Christians. "*We which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent (precede, go before) them which are asleep.*" Living Christians at the time of the Lord's appearance are not to "go before" those Christians who have previously died.

In these verses the Apostle Paul, by the word of the Lord, established the order of the resurrection of dead Christians and the translation of living Christians at the time of the Lord's appearing.

3.

The Oriental Wedding

"For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent (precede) them which are asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together

with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord." 1 Thess. 4:15-17.

It is not an angel that will come to gather the church, the bride of Christ, home to the divine Bridegroom, the Lord Jesus Christ. The Apostle Paul wrote, "For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven." Our great expectation is the personal appearance of the Lord Jesus Christ to receive us unto Himself. Many miss the significance of the figures of the bride and the bridegroom because they are unaware of the customs of the Oriental wedding as they were practiced in Israel.

There are three major events that must be fulfilled in proper order so that an Oriental wedding is binding and legal. The first of these steps is the "betrothal." The betrothal takes place through the preparation of a legal contract between the parents of the groom and the bride, often many years before the marriage is consummated. In many cases the bridegroom and the bride are still children at the time that the marriage contract is prepared and signed by the respective fathers. However, the contract is binding, and the bridegroom and bride are considered legally married, even though the latter parts of the marriage ceremonies have not yet taken place and the couple has not yet come together. It requires a bill of divorcement in order to legally dissolve this marriage contract.

This is the situation that existed between Mary and Joseph at the time that the Holy Spirit came upon Mary and the child Jesus was miraculously conceived. See Matthew 1:18-19. This passage says Joseph and Mary were espoused (that is, betrothed), and Joseph is referred to as Mary's husband. The latter parts of their marriage ceremony were yet to be accomplished at that time.

As the day approached in which the Oriental wedding was to be consummated, the bridegroom busily prepared a place for the bride "in his father's house." Then on that great day, the bridegroom would leave his father's house with his wedding party, go to the house of the father of the bride, claim her and take her back to his father's house. That was the second event of the Oriental wedding.

Then at the house of the father of the bridegroom a great wedding supper was given. All the families of the bridegroom and bride and all their friends attended. At this ceremony, the bridegroom and bride drank wine together from the same cup, and they were legally married. This was the third and final event of the marriage formalities.

We, the church, are the betrothed bride of Christ. The marriage contract was signed in His blood on the cross. Our Bridegroom has gone to His Father's house to prepare a place for us. And now, we are waiting for the second event of the marriage formalities. The Bridegroom must come and carry us home to "His Father's house." We await His coming.

4.

The Three Sounds

"For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first." 1 Thess. 4:16.

On that wonderful day, when our Lord Jesus Christ will come for His bride, the church, three sounds will

announce His arrival: a "shout," apparently from the Lord Himself, the voice of the archangel and the trump of God.

The Shout

The Greek word translated "shout" means "to command," "to bid" or "to urge on." God has depicted the meaning of this heavenly call in that wonderful and — to many — mysterious book of the Old Testament called "The Song of Solomon." If you recall, this little book tells the story of the humble shepherd lover that woos and wins the heart of the sun-blackened shepherdess as she tends her flock in the hills of Palestine. After the heart of the maiden is won by the shepherd lover, he goes away for a long interval, but she remains faithful to him, even though she is sought after by a prince of this world. When the shepherd lover returns to claim her, however, he is no longer the shepherd, but now he himself is the King of Kings.

In the Song of Solomon 2:8-13 we find the wonderful words spoken by the absent bridegroom as he returns for his bride. *"Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away. For, lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone; the flowers appear on the earth; the time of the singing of birds is come, and the voice of the turtle (dove) is heard in our land. The fig tree putteth forth her green figs, and the vines with the tender grape give a good smell. Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away."*

The Voice of the Archangel

The bride of Christ is also to hear "the voice of the archangel" at our Lord's appearing. We know from Jude 9 that the archangel is Michael. The book of Daniel reveals that Michael is the angelic prince who is given special charge over the affairs of Israel. And here the Apostle Paul said that "the voice of the archangel" is to accompany the Lord's appearing for His church.

The calling out of the church has been God's special program during this interadvent age of grace. God's program for Israel was temporarily suspended when that nation rejected their Messiah at His first advent. God's program for the church was initiated at the coming of the Holy Spirit to the earth on the day of Pentecost. But God's earthly program for the church ends on the day of the Lord's appearing, which is described in I Thessalonians.

The removal of the church from the earth clears the way for God to resume His program for Israel. The "voice of the archangel," heard at the catching away of the church, announces the soon coming "day of the LORD" to those in Israel who will hear. First Thessalonians 4:16 is the fulfillment of Daniel 12:1, where the prophet wrote, *"And at that time shall Michael stand up, the great prince which standeth for the children of thy people: and there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time: and at that time thy people shall be delivered, every one that shall be found written in the book."*

Notice particularly the sequence of events mentioned by Daniel: (1) the "standing up" of Michael, (2) the time of "great trouble" and (3) the deliverance of "the children of thy people," that is, the children of Israel.

The Trump of God

We are also told that there is a third sound accompanying our Lord's appearing: "the trump of God." Trumpets are often used in Scripture to herald important announcements and events. Numbers 10:2-8 shows that the trumpets of the priest served two functions: to call an assembly and to sound an alarm. Notice that an assembly and/or march, or a move, was commanded by the blowing of a trumpet.

The "trump of God" which sounds at the time of the Lord's appearing for His church serves both of these purposes. The "trump of God" calls an assembly of both the dead and the living members of the bride of Christ, the church. *"The dead in Christ shall rise first: then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord."*

The "trump of God" also sounds an alarm. The Prophet Joel wrote, *"Blow ye the trumpet in Zion, and sound an alarm in my holy mountain: let all the inhabitants of the land tremble: for the day of the LORD cometh, for it is nigh at hand."* Joel 2:1. The "trump of God" that calls an assembly of the church is also the trump that sounds the alarm in Israel, heralding the approach of "the day of the LORD."

The Last Trump

This same trump is also mentioned by the Apostle Paul in I Corinthians 15:51-52. *"Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump, for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed."*

Why is the "trump of God" called the "last trump" in this passage? Some Bible scholars have incorrectly assumed that this "last trump" is to be identified as the seventh trumpet of the "trumpet judgments" mentioned in Revelation 11:15, and therefore have said that the "rapture" of the church occurs near the end of the tribulation.

No, the "last trump" of I Corinthians 15:52, also called the "trump of God" in the I Thessalonians passage we are studying, is not the seventh trumpet mentioned in

the book of Revelation. That later trumpet is specifically identified as the trumpet of an angel. The book of Revelation was not written for some thirty years after the Apostle Paul wrote his first epistle to the Corinthians. So there is no possible way that he could have been trying to draw attention to the seventh trumpet of Revelation when he designated this "trump of God" as the "last trump."

In Paul's day the Roman army used three trumpet calls for breaking their camps and advancing. The first blast meant "strike tents, prepare to depart." A second blast conveyed the order to "fall in line." And then, the third trumpet call, commonly known as "the last trump," would sound. This call meant "march away!"

And now, what do we wait for in our Christian experience? We are waiting for that "last trump." When that trumpet sounds, we will be summoned — not to march away — not even to fly away — but rather to be "caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air; and so shall we ever be with the Lord." That "last trump" is our command to move out — to leave our "camp" in this veil of tears and go to the new "camp" — in the presence of the Lord!

The Apostle Paul has supplied a clear answer to the question concerning the order of the resurrection of the "dead in Christ" and the translation of the "alive" in Christ. Those living at the time of the Lord's appearing will not go to Him ahead of those who are dead. The dead Christians will be resurrected, the living Christians will be transformed, and we will all rise to meet Him in the atmospheric heaven in the cloud of His Shekinah glory as one united body. This is our great hope — our great expectation. "Wherefore comfort one another with these words."

5. Sudden Destruction Upon the World

“But of the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you. For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night. For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape. But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief. Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness. Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober. For they that sleep sleep in the night; and they that be drunken are drunken in the night. But let us, who are of the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love; and for an helmet, the hope of salvation. For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ, Who died for us, that, whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with him. Wherefore comfort yourselves together, and edify one another, even as also ye do.” I Thess. 5:1-11.

After carefully establishing the order of the rapture, the Apostle Paul turned his attention to those things that are to come on the earth shortly afterward. And he went on to say, “But of the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you.”

Paul had done a thorough job in his preliminary teaching of the Christians at Thessalonica. No doubt he had made them aware of the Lord’s own words, spoken just before His ascension into heaven, concerning His

return. Jesus had said, "It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power." Acts 1:7. Certainly the Apostle Paul also taught them the words spoken by the Lord to His disciples on the Mount of Olives. "But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only." Matt. 24:36. So apparently that's why the apostle wrote, "But of the times and seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you."

He went on to say, "For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night." The Thessalonian Christians were aware of the writings of the Old Testament prophets concerning "the day of the LORD." They were made aware that this time was to fall on the world suddenly; and to those who chose to ignore the Word of God and the salvation offered through the shed blood of God's Son, it would come unexpectedly "as a thief in the night."

Christians are not to occupy themselves with speculations concerning the exact time at which these events will transpire. The "times and the seasons" are in God's hands, and the bringing about of these things upon the world is the prerogative of God only. But Christians are to "comfort one another" with the facts that have been revealed about the catching away of the church before the day of wrath comes.

References to Believers; Unbelievers

Throughout this passage, Paul carefully distinguished between the expectation of the believers and nonbelievers at the time of the Lord's appearing and the subsequent coming of "the day of the Lord." "They" (unbelievers) will have sudden destruction come upon "them," and "they" shall not escape. Unbelievers are "children of darkness," and their expectation is the coming of

“sudden destruction” as the dark initial period of “the day of the Lord” envelopes the earth.

“But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief.” In contrast to the expectation of unbelievers, Paul plainly stated that Christians are not to be overtaken by “the day of the Lord.” Christians are not in darkness but are bathed in the glorious light of the “Sun of righteousness.” Christians will not be overtaken by “the day of the Lord” because we “are to be caught up together” with the dead in Christ to meet the Lord in the air.

Be Watchful

Christians are not to “sleep” as do the people of the world. We are to be alert and watchful because we expect the imminent coming of our Bridegroom. Therefore “let us, who are of the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and for an helmet, the hope of salvation.” The word translated “hope” actually refers to certainty. And the word “salvation,” as used in this context, does not refer to eternal salvation for the lost sinner. It means saving from the wrath of God that is to fall on the earth during “the day of the Lord.”

We have this precise and comforting statement in verses 8-9. “For God hath not appointed us (Christians) to wrath, but to obtain salvation (that is, saving from that wrath) by (the appearing of) our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, that, whether we wake or sleep (that is, whether we are among the living or the dead at the time of His appearing), we should live together with him.”

Paul’s words should settle for all time the question as to whether or not the church is to endure any part of “the tribulation.” Paul has stated that the catching away of the church precedes the coming of “the day of the Lord.” and

he said. "Wherefore comfort yourselves together, and edify one another, even as also ye do." Those who teach that the church enters the tribulation are robbing fellow Christians of this comfort.

6. Paul's Second Declaration

"Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering unto him, 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 (the Lord) is at hand." II Thess. 2:1-2.

After receiving Paul's first epistle, the Thessalonian church came under intense persecution. Consequently many in Thessalonica believed that "the day of the Lord" had already begun. This belief was supported by the proclamation of false teachers, some even within the church. These false teachers had so stirred up this assembly that even Paul's first letter did not end all the confusion.

Paul personally had taught these Thessalonian converts that "the tribulation" could not come until after the Lord appeared to call His church out of this world. Paul repeated this teaching in his first epistle. But the coming of the intense persecution at Thessalonica coupled with the arrival of a forged letter (supposedly from Paul) which said that "the day of the Lord" had already arrived caused many to become confused. Some were convinced that "the day of the Lord" had arrived and that somehow they had been left behind when the Lord appeared for His church. They believed they were

experiencing the persecutions and the judgments of the beginning of "the tribulation." It was this situation that led the Apostle Paul to pen the prophecy of II Thessalonians 2:1-2.

The Prophesied Tribulation Not At Hand

The apostle wanted the Thessalonian Christians to know definitely that they were not experiencing the prophesied "tribulation" that opens "the day of the Lord." Those who were God's children in Thessalonica (as well as all those who are God's children down through this age of grace) are not to be confused concerning the time and the manner of the coming of "the day of the Lord."

In essence, Paul said, "Now we earnestly beg you, brethren, concerning the subject of the rapture of the church, that ye be not quickly shaken in mind, or be stirred up to confusion, neither by spirit (that is, by lying demon spirits sent by Satan to provide revelation, supposedly from God), nor by word (that is, by false human teachers who would speak personally and directly to the assembly), nor by letter as if from us (that is, by forged letter that supposedly came from Paul and his companions) — do not be confused by any of these means of communication — when they attempt to tell you that 'the day of the Lord' is already at hand."

Satan's Purpose

The Apostle Paul acknowledged that it is Satan's purpose to confuse God's people on the order of the appearing of the Lord Jesus Christ for His church (the rapture) and the coming of "the day of the Lord." Satan wants the people of God to think that they are to go through that time of judgment. By confusing the children of God on this subject, he is able to rob them of the

comfort of knowing that the Lord *is* to appear in the air to catch His church away before the coming of the seventieth week of Daniel.

When Paul spoke of "the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ" and "our gathering unto him," he could have only one event in mind: the rapture of the church. The Greek word translated "coming" in both I Thessalonians 4:15 (where Paul was most definitely speaking of the rapture of the church) and in II Thessalonians 2:1 is *parousia*. This word literally means "a personal appearing." When Paul used this Greek word, he was specifically referring to the coming of Christ to personally receive His church. That is, Paul used the word to refer to the rapture.

7.

A "Pre-Tribulational" Rapture

"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; 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." II Thess. 2:3-4.

These verses contain the clearest revelation found in God's Word of the chronological relationship between the rapture of the church and the coming of the tribulation. God had permitted a situation to develop in the city of Thessalonica that made it necessary for Paul to write the statements contained in these verses. And these declarations were not for the Thessalonian Christians only, but for Christians of all times culminating in that day when the

Lord actually appears to gather His church out of this world.

Satan used all the communication media in his power to try to confuse the minds of God's children in Thessalonica. He even caused a forged epistle to be written to them. The evil one can be expected to continue to use these media as this age moves on toward its close. Just as he did at Thessalonica, he has given false teachings through lying spirits.

Therefore Paul sounded a warning in verses 3 and 4. "Let no man (actually no one) deceive you by any means: for that day (the day of the Lord) shall not come, except there come a falling away (*apostasia*, or departure, that is, the departure of the church from the earth) first, and that man of lawlessness be unveiled, the son of perdition." Paul here provided the sequence of events that climax this age of grace. "The day of the Lord" cannot begin, indeed, the man of lawlessness (the world dictator of the seven-year tribulation period, the antichrist) cannot even be unveiled until after the departure of the church to be with her Lord. The rapture must precede the revelation of the identity of the man of sin, and the rapture must precede the beginning of "the day of the Lord."

Covenant Begins "The Seventieth Week"

Daniel 9:27 reveals that the seventieth week of Daniel (which is the tribulation period) is to begin with the signing of a seven-year covenant of protection between the nation of Israel and the man of lawlessness. Thus, his identity must be revealed and known before the tribulation period comes upon the earth. Paul declared that the rapture of the church must precede the unveiling of the identity of the man of lawlessness, and the coming of the tribulation, and no part of the tribulation can come before Christ comes for His church.

There are two difficulties in the Scripture text that have kept the main emphasis of Paul's message from being more widely understood. The first is actually a textual problem, and it occurs in verse 2. In the King James Version, the last clause of this verse reads, "As that the day of Christ is at hand." The expression "the day of Christ" is used elsewhere in the Scripture to refer to the rapture itself. When Christ comes to receive His church in the air, then that is "the day of Christ." The "day of Christ" appears to actually refer to a literal day.

"The Day of the Lord"

However, since the translation of our King James Version of the Bible, older Greek manuscripts have been discovered. These manuscripts support the reading "the day of the Lord" instead of "the day of Christ" in verse 2. Scholars therefore generally agree that Paul was not referring to "the day of Christ" (the rapture) but to "the day of the Lord" (which is the tribulation followed by the millennium). And it is "that day" that cannot precede the rapture.

The other difficulty concerns the translation of the Greek word *apostasia* in verse 3. This is a direct reference to the rapture, but it does not appear as such because of the wording of most of our English versions.

8.

“The Departure”

“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.” II Thess. 2:3.

To warn of Satan's concentrated efforts to confuse the doctrine of the rapture, the Apostle Paul wrote, “Let no man (or better, ‘no one’) deceive you by any means.” Paul was earnestly concerned that God's children not allow Satan to confuse their understanding of this doctrine. This charge is especially appropriate to us today as we see the end of the age approaching.

Paul has definitely stated here that “the day of the Lord” cannot come upon the earth until after the rapture has taken place. This statement should end forever the controversy as to whether or not the church will go through the tribulation period. But the reason that more people do not turn to this passage and know beyond doubt what the Bible teaches concerning this subject is primarily because of our King James Version's translation of “a falling away” for the Greek word *apostasia*. We get the English word “apostasy” from this Greek term. And the English word “apostasy” has definitely come to mean a departure from revealed truth or a falling away from truth once believed. Therefore, it has usually been assumed that when Paul spoke of the *apostasia*, he was referring to an apostasy in doctrine, not to the rapture.

The Meaning of “Apostasia”

The Greek word *apostasia* literally means “a departure,” as on a journey. It can mean a departure from

revealed truth, but this meaning requires additional qualifying words. One who spoke the Greek of Paul's day would refer to a departure upon a journey as an *apostasia*. The usual interpretation of II Thessalonians 2:3 seems to be biased by the fact that *apostasia* is used — in noun form — at only one other place in the New Testament. There the word *does* refer to "a departure from revealed truth." In Acts 21:21 we have the words that the believers in Caesarea spoke to Paul. "And they are informed of thee, that thou teachest all the Jews which are among the Gentiles to forsake (*apostasian*) Moses." Here the word *apostasia* is translated "forsake" because the context makes the word mean "a departure in doctrine." But this one usage of the word does not fix its meaning in all other contexts.

The verb form of *apostasia* (*aphistemi*) appears in eleven places in the Greek New Testament, and in every one of these it most definitely means "to depart as on a journey." New Testament usage of the Greek root of this word firmly establishes that normally *apostasia* refers not to a departure in doctrine but to a departure on a journey.

A Specific Departure

Here in II Thessalonians 2:3 the Apostle Paul designated a specific "departure." He did not say "an *apostasia*," but rather "the *apostasia*." The Greek text includes the definite article, even though it is not translated in most English versions. There is no specific prophecy anywhere else in Scripture that refers to any definite time in the future as "the falling away" ("the apostasy"). Scripture reveals that the general trend throughout this age will be toward apostasy in doctrine, and this situation will worsen as the end of the age nears.

In II Thessalonians 2:1 the Apostle Paul was speaking of the rapture of the church when he said, "Now we

beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him." He was still speaking of the rapture, when here in verse 3 he referred to "the departure." He was speaking of the departure of the church out of the earth to be with the Lord in His Father's house. This is a specific prophetic event which can be designated by the use of the definite article "the" as "*the* departure," or "the rapture."

The word "rapture" is derived from the Latin *raptura*, which also means "a departure, as on a journey." When we speak of "the rapture," we are actually speaking of "the departure." In the Latin Vulgate version of the Bible, the word *raptura* is used as the equivalent of the Greek *apostasia* in II Thessalonians 2:3. In fact, our very word "rapture" comes from the Latin Vulgate translation of II Thessalonians 2:3. Actually, II Thessalonians 2:3 can be literally translated as follows. "Let no one deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come the *rapture* of the church first, and then that man of lawlessness be unveiled, the son of perdition."

According to the Old Testament prophets, "the day of the Lord" begins with the seven-year period known as *the* tribulation. II Thessalonians 2:3 should forever end the controversy that exists today concerning the exact chronology of the rapture of the church and the coming of the tribulation, for Paul has definitely said that the rapture of the church *must precede* the coming of the tribulation. This is why in his first epistle to them, Paul twice told the Thessalonian Christians to "comfort one another with these words."

9. The Revelation of the Man of Sin

“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.” II Thess. 2:4.

In this verse the Apostle Paul revealed a tremendous amount of information concerning the coming “bloody and deceitful man” (Psalms 5:6) who is to establish himself in the role of the counterfeit Messiah (the antichrist) during that seven-year period which marks the beginning of “the day of the Lord.” Paul said his identity is to be revealed to the world after the church has been caught up to heaven. This man will be a “total outlaw.” That is, he will totally disregard all the laws of God that have (to a degree) governed the people of the earth since God’s covenant with Noah after the flood.

The Prophet Daniel wrote of this coming ruler who will “think to change times and laws.” Dan. 7:25. He is the king of whom Daniel was speaking in Daniel 11:36-37: *“And the king shall do according to his will; and he shall exalt himself, and magnify himself above every god, and shall speak marvelous things against the God of gods, and shall prosper till the indignation be accomplished: for that that is determined shall be done. Neither shall he regard the God of his fathers, nor the desire of women, nor regard any god: for he shall magnify himself above all.”*

“Changed Times and Laws”

This man is opposed to everything that speaks of the law of the God of creation. He is the man of lawlessness

and to use an expression that is coined to describe the hero of what seems to be our present day "bible of the antichrist" (a powerful little book called *Jonathan Livingston Seagull*), he will be a "total outlaw." He will stand against everything that presently constitutes what is called "moral law," and he will bring his changed times and laws into force upon the tribulational earth.

Paul further identified this coming "man of sin" (or "lawlessness") as the "son of perdition." II Thessalonians 2:3. The word "perdition" refers to wickedness personified. It is an expression that is applied to that spirit being who is the very father of wickedness, that one of whom the Lord was speaking when in John 8:44 He said to the Pharisees, "*Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it.*" When this coming man of lawlessness is referred to as "the son of perdition," he is being called the son of Satan himself.

Only one other man in Scripture is referred to as "the son of perdition." The Lord used this term to refer to Judas Iscariot. The Lord also called Judas a "devil." Because Judas Iscariot and the coming man of sin are both referred to as "the son of perdition," some have speculated that the coming antichrist will be Judas Iscariot in a resurrected or restored state. However, this does not appear to be a substantiated conclusion because any man who is directly indwelt by Satan could properly be called a "son of perdition." We are definitely told that "Satan entered into him (Judas Iscariot)" at the time that he betrayed the Lord. John 13:27. When Satan entered in, then Judas became "the son of perdition." He was actually a son of Satan, a son of the destroyer.

Indwelt by Satan

We conclude from Paul's words that this coming "willful king" will be directly indwelt by Satan himself. This will make him the "son of perdition." He actually will become the offspring of Satan, just as in the incarnation our Lord in His humanity became the offspring of God. This "son of perdition" is the very one who is referred to as Satan's "seed" in the prophecy of Genesis 3:15. He is the one whose head is to be crushed by the Seed of woman.

But the church, the bride of Christ, will not be on the earth to see the revelation of this coming wicked one. The Apostle Paul has made it clear in both of his Thessalonian epistles that this man cannot be revealed until after the Lord's appearing to personally catch His church up out of the earth, "*Wherefore comfort one another with these words.*" 1 Thess. 4:18.

10.

The Bridegroom Cometh

"The voice of my beloved! behold, he cometh leaping upon the mountains, skipping upon the hills. My beloved is like a roe or a young hart: behold, he standeth behind our wall, he looketh forth at the windows, shewing himself through the lattice. My beloved spake, and said unto me, Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away. For, lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone; The flowers appear on the earth; the time of the singing of birds is come, and the voice of the turtle (dove) is heard in our land; the fig tree putteth forth her green figs, and the vines with the tender grape give a good smell. Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away." Song of Solomon 2:8-13.

It is only in the light of New Testament revelation and through the ministry of the Holy Spirit that God's people today are able to understand the wonderful little Old Testament book called the Song of Solomon. First, it typifies the beautiful relationship that exists between the Lord Jesus Christ and His church, His betrothed bride. It reveals the great love that our Lord holds for His church, which He loved and gave Himself for, *"That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish."* Eph. 5:26-27.

And to this revealed love of our Lord, the Song of Solomon also presents the church's glad response.

Second, Song of Solomon typifies that wonderful relationship that exists between Christ and the individual Christian. Down through the centuries of the Christian era, many a devoted disciple has echoed the words of Song of Solomon 7:10, *"I am my beloved's and his desire is toward me."*

There have been some differences of opinion about the story told in Song of Solomon. But to me it tells of the young maiden, a shepherdess, who tends her flocks on the hills outside of Jerusalem. This young girl does not have the glamor or beauty that is the possession of many other girls her age. Her own statement of this is in chapter 1, verses 5-6: *"I am black, but comely, O ye daughters of Jerusalem, as the tents of Kedar, as the curtains of Solomon. Look not upon me, because I am black, because the sun hath looked upon me: my mother's children were angry with me; they made me the keeper of the vineyards; but mine own vineyard have I not kept."* The word translated "black" actually means "sun darkened." Heavy tans from the sun's rays were not considered attractive to Hebrew maidens. But the spiritual

meaning here seems to refer to the presence of sin from the fallen nature.

The Shepherd Lover

As the story goes on, we find that one day a young prince, disguised in the rough garb of a shepherd, comes her way and he sees within her a beauty that is not seen by the world. He loves her and she returns his love. But the shepherd lover must go away. He tells her that he will return for her and make her his bride.

After the shepherd "has gone into a far country to receive a kingdom and return," the villainous King Solomon comes along. He is also attracted to this maiden and he desires to have her in his harem. He takes her away to his court and he tries to win her to his harem by plying her with the riches of the world. But her heart remains true to the shepherd lover. Her desire is toward him. She believes that he will come to her, even after long years of his absence have passed.

Then one day, when all hope seems lost, his voice comes to her. She says, "My beloved spake, and said unto me, Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away. For, lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone; the flowers appear on the earth; the time of the singing of birds is come. . . ." Song of Solomon 2:10-12.

A Precious Truth to All Believers

Those of us who know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ realize something of what this story means. He has saved us and won our hearts, just as this shepherd lover won the heart of the sun darkened shepherdess. He has gone away, but He said, "I will come again, and receive you unto myself." John 14:3. And when He comes, He will no longer be the humble shepherd; then He will be the

mighty King, the One who is greater than Solomon, the Messiah who will come a second time in power and glory. It was the shepherd that won the maiden's heart, but it was to the King of Kings that she was wedded. And in like fashion, our Lord Jesus Christ, the Good Shepherd, has won us for Himself. But He will be the King when we, His church, sit with Him upon the throne.

The scoffers of the world say that we will never see Him again. They say, "Where is the promise of his coming?" II Peter 3:4. But yet His last words were, "Surely I come quickly." Rev. 22:20. So, in spite of the scoffers of the world, the faithful Christian lives in the daily expectation of Christ's appearance.

Let's recall once again the words of the Apostle Paul in I Thessalonians 4:16-17: *"For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord."*

The words of that shout are given to us in the Song of Solomon. And it should stir our hearts when we realize that at any moment we may hear the sound of His voice, saying, "Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away."

The End