

2nd THESSALONIANS

2:1-12

Introduction

You might be shocked at the extent of lying in our society. Research has shown that the average person tells a lie every eight minutes. Let's put that into context by calculating the frequency:

1. That is seven lies per hour.
2. One-hundred twelve lies in a sixteen-hour day.
3. Forty thousand eight-hundred eighty lies per year.
4. 2.8 million lies over a seventy-year lifetime.

A national survey, conducted in 1984 for the Internal Revenue Service, reports that half of Americans have a "flexible" standard of honesty. Falsifying tax forms is so common that the IRS assumes each tax return is incorrect.

The American Insurance Association estimates that one-fifth of insurance claims are fraudulent, most commonly in the form of the "disappearing deductible," where the insured raises the claim amount to cover their out-of-pocket costs.

This is exactly what you would expect from reading the Bible. In the Garden of Eden God told Adam and Eve they could eat the fruit of all the trees except one – the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. He further told them that "in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die" (Genesis 2:17).

Along came Satan. Lying to Eve, he said "God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil" (Genesis 3:5). Adam and Eve believed the lie and mankind has been deceiving and being deceived by lying ever since.

Lying is going to get even worse in the future. In our text we read of a time when "lying wonders" will be performed; a time of "unrighteous deception"; a time of "strong delusion" when mankind will "believe the

lie." That time is the seven-year Great Tribulation that is coming upon the earth.

The believers in the city of Thessalonica were being lied to. They were being told that the seven-year Great Tribulation had already begun, and that were enduring its judgments. This letter – and especially these twelve verses – were written to expose that teaching as a lie.

We'll organize our thoughts around two points: #1 If You Believe The Lord You Will Be Removed Before The Tribulation, but #2 If You Remain For The Tribulation You Will Believe The Lie.

#1 If You Believe The Lord
You Will Be Removed Before The Tribulation
(v1-7)

A terrible lie is the reason for this letter – the lie that they were already in the Great Tribulation. No, no they were not... and they would not ever be... **And neither will we.** The apostle Paul sets out a clear order of the events that must take place before the Great Tribulation can begin to show that believers of the Church Age cannot remain on the earth to be a part of it.

He begins with the Rapture of the Church in verse one.

2 Thessalonians 2:1 Now, brethren, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him...

This sentence is a summary of what you learn in First Thessalonians 4:13-18. Jesus is "coming" to "gather" His Church from the earth to heaven in what is called the Rapture. If you are a Christian you could be caught-up to heaven at any moment!

The Thessalonians believed they could be caught-up to heaven at any moment. But they were enduring intense persecution for their faith in Jesus. While they were trying to put all of it into perspective, someone or some group lied to them. In verse two you read,

2 Thessalonians 2:2 not to be soon shaken in mind or troubled, either by spirit or by word or by letter, as if from us, as though the day of Christ had come.

The word "shaken" could be used of an earthquake; "troubled" means *frightened*. It was like a spiritual earthquake had hit and now they were still feeling its aftershocks. Someone had told them "the Day of Christ" had come. The "Day of Christ," or the Day of the Lord, is the time of God's judgment upon the earth that includes the Great Tribulation. It is a time of unprecedented global tribulation that will last seven years. They were being told it had already begun.

The lies were in three forms - by "spirit," by "word," and by "letter as if from us..."

1. "Spirit" is probably referring to the utterance of a prophecy during a meeting of the Church.
2. "Word" probably refers to a rumor that Paul and other apostles and teachers were now claiming that the Great Tribulation had begun.
3. "Letter" probably refers to a false document with a forged signature.

At any given time there are numerous false teachings that seek to undermine your foundation as a believer. You need not be "shaken in mind" and "troubled" by them. You can have a disciplined mind that carefully considers everything in the light of Scripture before coming to a conclusion.

There is a lot of confusion among Christians regarding the relationship of the Rapture and the Great Tribulation. There are four views:

1. The view we take is that the Rapture occurs prior to any part of the Tribulation on earth. It is therefore called the **Pre-tribulation** Rapture.
2. Some say that the Rapture will occur in the middle of the Tribulation on earth. It is called the **Mid-tribulation** Rapture.
3. Some say that the Rapture will occur towards the end of the Tribulation on earth. They say that the Church will suffer the wrath of men but *not* the final wrath of God; so they call their view the **Pre-wrath** Rapture.
4. Still others say that the Church will go through the entire Tribulation on earth. When Jesus returns in His Second Coming He will first Rapture the surviving saints and they immediately

return with Him to rule and reign. This is called the **Post-tribulation** Rapture.

The apostle Paul was pretrib! In verses three through seven he lists three events which occur before the Great Tribulation can begin which show the Church will must be Raptured ahead of time.

First, *the falling away* must come:

2 Thessalonians 2:3 Let no one deceive you by any means; for *that Day will not come* unless the falling away comes first...

"Falling away" is *apostasy*. It is an active departure and deliberate abandonment of biblical Christianity by those who profess to be Christians.

There have been deceivers and apostasy throughout the history of Christianity. A modern survey of groups professing to be Christians reveals large-scale departure and abandonment from biblical Christianity. Groups like us and other Bible-believing Churches are ridiculed most by liberal churches that reject things like the inspiration and inerrancy of the Word of God... the virgin birth of Jesus... and His bodily resurrection from the dead.

Does that mean we are already in the Great Tribulation? *Not at all!* There will always be apostasy, but this identifies "**the** apostasy," the final falling away of the end times.

It is the final apostasy because it is associated with what Paul next mentions – the revealing of a certain historical person. His *revealing* is the second event which must occur before the Great Tribulation can begin. In fact, his revealing is what marks the beginning of those seven troubled years.

2 Thessalonians 2:3 Let no one deceive you by any means; for *that Day will not come* unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition,

Apostasy will become **the** apostasy when this man is "revealed." Think for a moment of all the evil, wicked world leaders throughout history – dictators and despots. This man will be the worst of them so

much so that he can be called "the man of sin." He will be the one who most typifies sin and rebellion against God.

He will be "the son of perdition." "Perdition" means *destruction* and indicates his ultimate fate. His ultimate fate is in verse eight.

We commonly call this man the antiChrist. He has about thirty names throughout the Bible. He is a real man who comes on the scene in the End Times and enforces a treaty with the nation of Israel that brings a temporary peace to the Middle East. He will be hailed as a political and military genius... But he will be "revealed" as the antiChrist:

2 Thessalonians 2:4 who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God.

Under his treaty the Jews will be allowed to rebuild their long-destroyed Temple in Jerusalem. They will reinstitute worship and sacrifice. In the very middle of the seven-year Tribulation, after three and one-half years, the antiChrist will enter the holiest section of the Temple and declare himself "god" and demand to be worshipped. This event was called "the abomination of desolation" by both the prophet Daniel and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Skip verse five for a moment and let's read verses six and seven:

2 Thessalonians 2:6 And now you know what is restraining, that he may be revealed in his own time.

2 Thessalonians 2:7 For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only He who now restrains *will do so* until He is taken out of the way.

I said that there were three events which occur before the Great Tribulation can begin which show the Church will must be Raptured ahead of time. This is the third. The "mystery of lawlessness" is our understanding as Christians that there is a devil who is definitely at work in the world seeking to overthrow the rule of our sovereign God. The devil's ultimate aim is exactly what he lied about to Eve in the Garden of Eden – to be like God. Satan will ultimately possess the antiChrist in order to receive worship.

Something **and** Someone is "restraining" the antiChrist from being "revealed":

1. I say "something" because of the wording, "you know what is restraining."
2. I say "Someone" because this same restrainer is referred to by the masculine participle, "He who now restrains."

This Restrainer is both something and Someone well-known to the Church whose power is great enough to hold-back the devil. It is, in fact, God the Holy Spirit.

He will be "taken out of the way" before antiChrist can be revealed. This can only refer to the Rapture of the Church! God the Holy Spirit has always been in the world and He always will. But after the resurrection of Jesus He came to believers in a new and unique way just as Jesus had promised. He came to indwell you, to live within you. You – the Church – are the *something* that acts as a restraint to evil being revealed; God the Holy Spirit indwelling you is the *Someone*. It is the Rapture of the Church from the earth to heaven that removes the restraint and the Restrainer so all Hell can break loose for seven years. During that terrible time God the Holy Spirit will still be *present* on the earth; but He won't be *resident* on the earth.

It's really very simple: The Tribulation cannot begin until the antiChrist is revealed; and the anti-Christ cannot be revealed until the Church is removed. Therefore the Rapture occurs *before* the Tribulation!

2 Thessalonians 2:5 Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you these things?

Probably they did... But they were deceived and needed to remember the truth. God's Word is the truth we need to constantly remember in order to put life into its proper perspective and return to a state of peace. And we especially need to remember prophecy!

Christian will be in heaven, in the place Jesus has gone to prepare for you. Unbelievers will be left behind.

#2 If You Remain For The Tribulation
You Will Believe The Lie
(v8-12)

The focus in these verses is the tragedy of rejecting Jesus Christ as your Savior in this day of grace. Once the Tribulation begins, it may be too late to receive the Lord. If you can't live for Jesus now, how will you die for Him then?

Paul began by summarizing the Tribulation in verse eight:

2 Thessalonians 2:8 And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord will consume with the breath of His mouth and destroy with the brightness of His coming.

The Tribulation begins when antiChrist is "revealed." It ends with the Second Coming of Jesus to earth. When He returns He easily overcomes the antiChrist and his forces. The "breath of His mouth" are the words Jesus speaks. The "brightness of His coming" is Jesus revealed in His glory and majesty.

Inbetween the revealing of the antiChrist and the revelation of Jesus Christ men on earth will hear the Gospel and be saved. But the next few verses ought to send a shiver up your spine – especially if you are not yet a Christian.

2 Thessalonians 2:9 The coming of the *lawless one* is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders,

2 Thessalonians 2:10 and with all unrighteous deception...

The antiChrist will be possessed by Satan. He will have satanic "power" to perform "signs" and "wonders." They will be "lying wonders" whose goal and aim is "deception" in order to keep people "unrighteous."

2 Thessalonians 2:10 and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved.

2 Thessalonians 2:11 And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie,

Wow! It almost sounds like God has condemned these people or predestined them for Hell. No, no; He hasn't. He acts to save them. In the Tribulation there will be ample opportunities to receive Jesus Christ. **Every** creature on the earth will hear the Gospel.

God is not willing that any should perish; but these will "not receive the love of the truth that they might be saved." The words indicate a willful rejection and refusal on their part.

What God does is give them over to the consequences of their willful rejection of the truth. If they won't receive the truth and be saved, then they will believe "the lie" and be "condemned."

"God will send them strong delusion" refers to an inward working of delusion upon their hearts. God does not lie; He tells them the truth by confronting them with the Gospel. But, having refused the Gospel and rejected Jesus Christ, there is an inward working of the sin they've chosen that leads them farther and farther away from the truth. God gives them over to their personal choice, to bear the consequences of their decision. They will thus "believe the lie" of antiChrist that man can be his own god and be like god.

They will be wrong. At the Second Coming of Jesus,

2 Thessalonians 2:12 that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.

These people willfully rejected the "truth" and instead were "well pleased with unrighteousness." When the sky breaks open to reveal Jesus it will be too late for them to repent.

Conclusion

Do you believe the Lord? Then you have no part in any part of the Tribulation.

Not a believer? Then – if the Rapture occurred today – you would be left behind to remain for the Tribulation. There's no guarantee you won't believe the lie and be lost for all eternity.

We like to say, "*Get right... Or get left.*"