



Bible Prophecy Update: Jun 14, 2020

The Rapture Comes First

Pastor JD Farag

All right. Well, good morning, and welcome to our livestream and verse by verse study through 2 Thessalonians. Today we are taking and tackling just one verse, verse 3, of 2 Thessalonians chapter two. I'll invite you if you're watching online, if you're here in the church, and you're not there already, I'll ask you to turn to 2 Thessalonians chapter 2 and verse 3. If you're able I'll ask you to stand, if not that's all right, you can follow along as I read.

I'm going to do something a little bit different today. I think you'll see why here in a moment. But I'm going to actually read this verse from the 1599 Geneva Bible, OK? Yeah, how cool is that, right? You got to love Bible software. So, this is pre-1611 King James; This is 1599 Geneva Bible and it reads as follows,

"Let no man deceive you by any means for that day [speaking of the tribulation] that day shall not come except there come a departing first and that man of sin [the Antichrist] be disclosed even the son of perdition."

Let's pray if you would join with me. Lord, thank you so much for your Word and thank you for this verse here in your Word. Lord, and I just pray that you'll give me clarity of speech, humility of heart, and Lord speak your servants are listening. We pray in Jesus name. Amen and amen. You can be seated, thank you All right.

I want to begin by thanking you for your patience with me concerning my understanding of the interpretation of this verse. As many of you know I've gone back and forth over the years, but in 2017 I settled it as it relates to the interpretation of this verse being about the rapture. As such I can stand before you today, and I can say with great certainty that Paul is referring to the rapture coming first here in verse 3.

If you'll kindly indulge me, I'll explain how I get there, and at the conclusion, I'll also explain why this matters now more than it ever has for us as Christians living in this world that we are living in. I owe a debt of gratitude to Dr. Andy Woods and his book titled, "The Falling Away: Spiritual Departure or Physical Rapture? A second look at 2 Thessalonians 2:3.

In it, he provides 10 reasons why what many refer to as the falling away, the apostasy, is actually the rapture of the church. I would really encourage you to get your hands on a copy of this booklet. It's actually really a booklet. God has used it in my life and it appears that I'm in pretty good company with many others as well.

A number of weeks ago, Don Stewart, who we had the privilege of having speak here a number of years ago was on "Happening Now" with Jack Hibbs who we also had more recently. They were asked this question regarding 2 Thessalonians 2:3, and Don Stewart brought up Dr. Andy Woods and his book that I just referenced.

This is Don Stewart we're talking about. This is a guy who when he teaches reads literally out of the Greek as he's teaching. I mean he's truly a scholar in every sense of the word. He said when asked the question, he said, "Before I read Andy's book, I was at about maybe a 6 on a scale of 1 to 10 that it was a reference to the rapture, but after reading Andy's book I am at like a 9.8, and for somebody like Don Stewart to say that? I got to tell you I was greatly encouraged.

Also, Dr. Arnold Fruchtenbaum who we also had the privilege of having speak here. This is a number of years ago at the old building. Dr. Arnold Fruchtenbaum, get this, revised the chapter of his book, a very well-known book, "The Footsteps of the Messiah," after reading Andy's book and reconsidering his own position of the falling away or the apostasy.



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So what follows are 3 reasons, there are many, but 3 reasons that sealed the deal for me in my quest to understand this game-changing passage. And when I say game-changing that's not hyperbole, I mean this changes everything. Again, I hope to expound more on that at the conclusion of our time. This is really a game-changer.

Here's the 1st reason. The context favors a physical departure interpretation of apostasia, which is the Greek word in the original language. In the context of both the subsequent verses and the prior verses, Paul is clearly speaking about the rapture and not the falling away. His first epistle: It's all about the rapture. It's all about the Lord's return.

Paul did not mention anything about a falling away or a great apostasy to the Thessalonians. Keep in mind this is very important: These were his first letters; These were his earliest letters. It was not until later in Paul's ministry arguably, until the end of his life chiefly when he's writing to Timothy that he talks about this last days' apostasy. But he never mentioned anything to the Thessalonians early on.

It wouldn't be until many years later that he would start talking about a falling away, a spiritual departure from the faith. But that is not the context. Of this Woods writes, "While the 3 rules of real estate are location, location, location, the 3 rules of Bible interpretation are context, context, context. Context is king when determining the meanings of words. This is especially true since words frequently have multiple meanings.

Take the word, apple, as an example. This is a great example. Think about how many meanings can be generated from the single word, apple. It can refer to a computer, a piece of fruit, the pupil of one's eye, and even New York City. So, when you see the word, apple, in a paragraph how do you know what the meaning is in play? The context answers that question. If the word, apple, is found in a context dealing with computers, it would be invalid to substitute a fruit understanding into the word, apple. Clearly, it is in the context of an Apple computer.

So too is the word, apostasia, clearly in the context of the rapture of the church. 2nd reason, early Bible translations favor the physical departure view. I have to say that this is perhaps one of the most compelling arguments such that the earliest Bible translations render the noun, apostasy, as departure. Wycliffe in the year 1384, Tyndale in the year 1526, Coverdale in the year 1535, Cranmer in the year 1539, Breeches in the year 1576, Beza in the year 1583, then finally the Geneva Bible both in 1599, and also in the year 1608.

Well, that brings up a question, doesn't it? The question is, when is it that the translators changed the noun, apostasy, from departure or departing to falling away in the later translations? For that answer, Woods sites Dr. Thomas Ice who offers the following explanation. Listen to this.

"Most scholars say that no one knows the reason for the translation shift. However, a plausible theory has been put forth by Martin Butalla in his Master of Theology Thesis produced at Dallas theological seminary in 1998. It appears [get this] that the Catholic translation into English from Jerome's Latin Vulgate known as the Rheims Bible 1576 was the first to break the translation trend. Apostasia was revised from 'the departure' to 'the Protestant revolt'."

Now, that makes sense! No wonder! Oh, it gets better. Revolution is the terminology still in use today when Catholicism teaches the history of the Protestant Reformation. Under this guise, apostasia would refer to a departure of Protestants from the Catholic Church. Let me just insert parenthetically that the campaign now with a dying Catholic church in these last days is, "Come back home."



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Oh, by the way, I learned this many, many years ago, and I never knew this. I'll never forget, it was on Valentine's Day and I took my wife out to dinner. This is many years ago on the mainland that's back when you could actually go out to dinner but, anyway way. We were sitting there and the server said, hey, what do you guys doing for Valentine's Day? Anything special after dinner? I said we're actually going to our prayer meeting at our church. He goes, oh, you are? We said, yeah. He goes, you must be Catholic. I'm like, looking for my crucifix. You know how they always keep Jesus on the cross? I didn't have any rosary beads or anything. I'm like, what in the world? Well, he says, oh, Catholic means universal. Oh, it does? Yeah.

So right now, Catholicism is like, come back home to the mother church, the universal church, because there was this departure, this apostasia, during the Protestant Reformation. I'm sorry I'm saying it like that but I mean, I feel duped. I feel better now. Let me just continue the quote, "The Catholic translators appear eager to engage in polemics against the reformation by even allowing it to impact Bible translation. Thus, the shift from a physical to a spiritual understanding of apostasia in 2 Thessalonians 2:3. In the Roman Catholic Rheims Bible English translation appears to have been theologically rather than exegetically motivated."

That right there settles it for me but I got one more reason. It's that 2 Thessalonians 2:3 is part of a review course Now stay with me on this. I have to confess that this was the biggest obstacle to my understanding of this verse being the rapture and not a spiritual departure or apostasy or falling away from the faith.

It was really this argument of if it was the rapture why wouldn't Paul use the Greek word, harpazo like he did in his first epistle? In Chapter 4 verse 17 when he says, "... a trumpet is going to sound and we who are alive and remain will be caught up..." English, harpazo- Greek, rapturous - Latin, which is transliterated rapture. Paul could have saved us a lot of problems if he would have just but used the word harpazo in verse 3.

Why didn't he? Answer: Because he's writing a 2nd letter to clarify and review everything that he had taught them when he was with them. He's also now writing this 2nd letter about a year after the first letter because there was a forged letter that was circulating after he left and it was as if from Paul. It was confusing them. It was scaring them, and it was messing them up, and they thought they missed the rapture. and they thought they were already in the tribulation. They're like, oh my goodness what about our loved ones that have died? What about them?

And that's why Paul says, no I don't want you to be ignorant concerning those who died in Christ. Let no man deceive you. By the way, can I... What are you going to say, no? Of course, I can. I need to say this at this juncture. Replete throughout Scripture particularly in the gospels from the Savior himself and then also as echoed by the Apostle Paul, there's this common theme of, "Do not be deceived." Do not be deceived Let no man deceive you.

Do you get the impression that there was deception? That this would be an issue? How about that famous very well-known Olivet Discourse Matthew 24? Oh, my goodness, pastors love to preach out of Matthew 24. When did the disciples asked Jesus what are going to be the signs of your return at the end of the age? And Jesus says, "Let no man deceive you." The first thing he says is, don't be deceived. There's going to be a lot of false Christs coming in my name. Don't be deceived and then he goes on and lists things like famines and pestilences and earthquakes...

Oh, by the way, we talked about this on Thursday night. Pastor Mac and I that he says, "Nation will rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom. In the original language of the Greek New



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Testament, that word for nation is ethnos where we get our English word for ethnic. In other words, ethnicity will rise up against ethnicity and these will be the beginning of birth pains meaning that they will come with greater frequency and in greater intensity. So, don't be deceived.

He's clearing it up and then when he gets to verse 5 which we will get to, Lord Willing, next week. We're in no hurry, in case you didn't notice, going through 2 Thessalonians chapter 2, and I hope you know why. I've shared it in the past, I'll share it again. I hope you don't tire of me saying it. But if you were to put a caption on a picture of what is happening in the world today, you could sum it up with "2 Thessalonians 2".

Do you know what is in this chapter? Do you know we're going to be talking about after verse 3? We're going to be talking about the Antichrist being revealed after the church is removed. He's this man of lawlessness and the mystery of lawlessness is already at work, and God says he himself will send this powerful delusion, deception and it will be so strong that people will believe the lie. Why? Because they rejected the truth! Oh, my goodness!

This is an apt description of exactly where we are at today in this world. Do you know what's going to happen next? The rapture. I was asked after first service, after the update. Pastor JD, you make it sound like it's really close. I mean my goodness! Actually... I'm getting ahead of myself, this is why this matters.

This is why this matters because if this is the rapture, and it is, do you realize if the Antichrist cannot be revealed, the lawlessness that we already see at work, and the rapture comes first then verse 3, the Antichrist is revealed and we're already seeing lawlessness at work? That means the rapture is like, really close.

I think about what Jesus said, he said, "Behold, I'm coming an hour you expect not." It's sooner than any of us could possibly imagine. Anyway, where was I? I was somewhere here with a deeply profound point I was making, I'm sure.

Verse 5, when we get to verse 5, Paul says this, don't you remember I told you this when I was with you? Wait. What did you tell us? What did you write to us? Don't you remember? No! I told you, okay, let's go over it again. I picture the Apostle Paul with his eraser and his chalkboard. I don't think they had chalkboards back then but let's just say they did. He takes his eraser, and he erases the chalkboard. He says, okay, let's start from scratch. Let's review the material. You don't remember? Okay, let's review everything and that's what this is.

Listen to, again, what Woods says. He says it best this way, "What Paul is doing in 2 Thessalonians 2 is he is reviewing ground that he has already covered. When you review prior ground you do not lay the fundamentals down all over again, do you? You do not use the identical vocabulary that you used previously. I am a teacher in a college and when I review for the test, I do not re-teach all the material covered earlier in the semester. I use different words.

What Paul is doing here is a review course, and that is why he does not use the identical language that he used to describe the rapture in 1 Thessalonians. It is also worth noting..." Listen very carefully, this is very important. This is what settled it for me. "That the mere absence of the word, harpazo, should not in and of itself disqualify a passage like 2 Thessalonians 2:3, from being a rapture passage since many commonly accepted rapture passages: John 14:1-3, this was a biggie for me, 1 Corinthians 15:50-58 where Paul says we shall not all sleep but we shall all be changed..."



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That's in the nursery of every church, "We shall not all sleep but we shall be changed [a metamorphosis] in the twinkling of an eye." We put off corruptible, the old bodies, I can't wait, and we put on our new glorified bodies. That's the rapture. He doesn't use the word, harpazo. Titus 2:13, our blessed hope also failed to use the term, harpazo.

"Moreover, many would also consider the catching up of the two witnesses during the tribulation period as a type of a rapture, Revelation 11:12 even though the verb harpazo is not employed here either." Makes sense. Okay.

Thank you, pastor, for that dissertation. Here's the question. Why does this even matter? Why are you getting so excited and so worked up? I'm glad you asked. You asked, right? I am going to answer anyway. I mean come on, with all due respect, the interpretation of 2 Thessalonians 2:3 is not a matter of salvation. Yeah, you're right. I concur.

But may I kindly suggest that while it may not be a matter of salvation, it can certainly be a matter of sanctification and I'll explain why. If this is the rapture, and I believe it absolutely is, then doesn't that sort of change the complexion of everything? Wouldn't it stand to reason that it would have a profound impact on how we live our lives? Bear with me.

Let's just say for purpose of discussion that I can't sign off on this, I still think it's a falling away, it's apostasy. It's a spiritual departing from the faith. Okay, fine, let's just talk about that. Okay? All right. Okay, so the tribulation can't begin, can't happen until "the", not a, the, which is another reason, by the way, the falling away comes first.

Oh, wait a minute. There's always been apostasy, and falling away, and a departure from the faith throughout the church age, and by the way, that's so ambiguous. That's like how do they say it, nailing Jell-O to the wall? Sorry, if you have a better one let me know afterward, I'll start using it. How do you get your hands on that? That doesn't make any sense.

Because then Paul in the context of the rapture is saying, oh, by the way, did we talk about this when I was there with you? Did I mention this in my 1st letter to you that there's going to be this apostasy, this falling away? Do you remember? Did I say that or was that a different church? Maybe that was the Corinthians that I told that to. Maybe it was the Ephesians... Maybe it wasn't... I mean, do you see where I'm going with this? It's so wishy-washy.

I used that term a couple weeks back during an update and one of our online members, I love this so much. I made the comment, "You cannot be wishy-washy about the rapture." So, the comment was, "I'm not wishy-washy, I'm watchy-watchy." I thought perfect! That's exactly right! That's a T-shirt right there, or a hat or something or a bumper sticker.

By the way, how does that make any sense that here Paul is trying to clarify what he told them when he was with them and he wrote to them? Why would he introduce this that he'd never mentioned to them? That would even further confuse them, wouldn't it? I mean that would bring up a whole list of questions. Well, wait a minute, how are we going to know when the last Christian has fallen away? It's actually the opposite by the way.

Okay, so it is the rapture. Now re-read the verse through the lens of this being the rapture and what does it say? It says the tribulation can't start until the rapture comes first and then the Antichrist is revealed. Oh, by the way, spoiler alert. Once the Antichrist is revealed? Lawlessness, deception, lying, signs, and wonders. That is a description of the 7-year tribulation. That's why it matters.



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Listen to what John said in 1 John Chapter 3:2-3, "Dear Friends, now we are children of God and what we will be, has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears..." Notice not comes, appears, that's the rapture. "We shall be like him for we shall see him as he is." And then he says this, "All who have this hope in him purify themselves just as he is pure."

In other words, when you know that the Lord could come at any time that is going to have a profound impact on how you live your life. You get your affairs in order. He's coming. Don't think for a moment this is referring to anything having to do with works, we're not saved by works. It's not a purifying ourselves, no, we are righteous in Christ.

Christ imputed righteousness, though our sins be as scarlet, Isaiah says, he makes them as white as snow. In other words, having this hope you get your affairs in order. You get right with the Lord. You get serious about the things of God with this hope. I know in my own life this anticipation of just how soon the Lord's return is for the rapture of the church? It affects everything I do, every decision I make, in every arena of life.

I want to share with you what someone said to me when I was just a new believer concerning the pre-trib rapture which I have always believed. I've been walking with the Lord for 38 years. I was well taught from the start and I'm so thankful for that. So, we're having this conversation and I'm sharing with him about why I believe in a pre-trib rapture. He says to me, he says, well you know what? I'm pan-trib. I'm like, pan... what?

I asked him what pan-trib meant? He said, well, I just believe it's all going to "pan out in the end." That always stuck with me and I thought, well okay, I'm young... I share that because maybe then, this was back in the '80s... Don't do the math, I was 5 so, a long time ago.

Maybe then, but today? I do not believe that the world in which we are living today is forgiving of such ambiguity. One need look no further than to the many Christians today who are sadly, unnecessarily, riddled with confusion, and filled with fear. I can't even begin to tell you how many questions we get emails, postings, Has the 6th seal been opened? Are we in the tribulation? No.

It's like the Thessalonians then, there are many now that think we're already in the tribulation, and the rapture doesn't come first. That's what I mean by we have to settle this; This has to be settled. You'll forgive the play on words but I see pan-trib believers as synonymous with "pan-icked" believers. They are uninformed at best and deceived at worst, and this is why it is so important.

I would even argue it is of paramount importance to be settled and sound and solid when it comes to the pre-tribulation rapture doctrine, doctrine. It should be noted that panic, do you know where the word panic comes from? Those of you that go to Israel with us, you know. We go to this place called Caesarea Philippi, a very, very interesting place, a very evil place.

In fact, it's where the gates of hell are, and it's where this false God was feared and worshipped. Do you know what that god's name was, god by the way with a little "g"? Do you what that god's name was? Pan where we get panic, fear. It's there that Jesus in Matthew 16 tells his disciples that the gates of hell would not overcome his church.

Let me say lastly that I am personally so very glad that I am sound doctrinally concerning the pre-tribulation rapture. Let me say the same thing in a different way. I cannot even imagine not having this settled, being unsure, unsettled. What if? Because at a time like this with everything that's happening in the world? No wonder Christians are so full of fear. He's not given us a spirit of fear. No wonder Christians are so confused. Satan is the author of confusion, of course, he wants to do that.



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I mean I know the rapture has to happen before the 7-year tribulation. Not only is that a game-changer that's a life-changer. Because no matter what happens and it's happening. it's getting real, isn't it? Would you agree? Hey, I was thinking about this... Now, this isn't very perky but I was thinking about this. What's next? No, right?

Hey by the way, last night, Atlanta Georgia, did you see this? They burned down a Wendy's, took over the streets, rioting, lawlessness, another black man killed by a white police officer. We don't know the facts but, oh my God, are you kidding me? What's the next thing?

I mean we know, at least I hope you know, that there's an agenda. We've talked about this in the update today. The agenda, to destroy, this controlled demolition of the current world order in order to usher in this reset and New World Order.

So, I'll close this way. I am totally at peace. I have no fear even if it gets worse before the rapture and it could, it could. I still have the Blessed Hope of the rapture. Even if things get worse before the rapture because I know that it will absolutely happen before all hell literally breaks loose. That's why this needs to be settled.

Why don't you stand and we'll pray? Thank you, Lord. Oh Lord, I thank you so much for your Word and thank you for this verse and the understanding of it. The rightly dividing of your Word of truth can just change everything and such is the case I believe here.

Lord, I pray for any here today or watching online that are maybe just really struggling and even fearful. Lord, I pray that you'll encourage and strengthen their hearts that they would be anchored and settled in the Blessed Hope. That they would settle it, that you're coming soon, very soon, sooner than any of us could possibly imagine. Everything that you told us would happen at the time of the end is happening, it's happening.

So, Lord, thank you. It's not that we're giving up, it's that we're looking up because we know our redemption draws nigh.

Even so, Lord Jesus, come quickly. Maranatha.

In Jesus name. Amen.