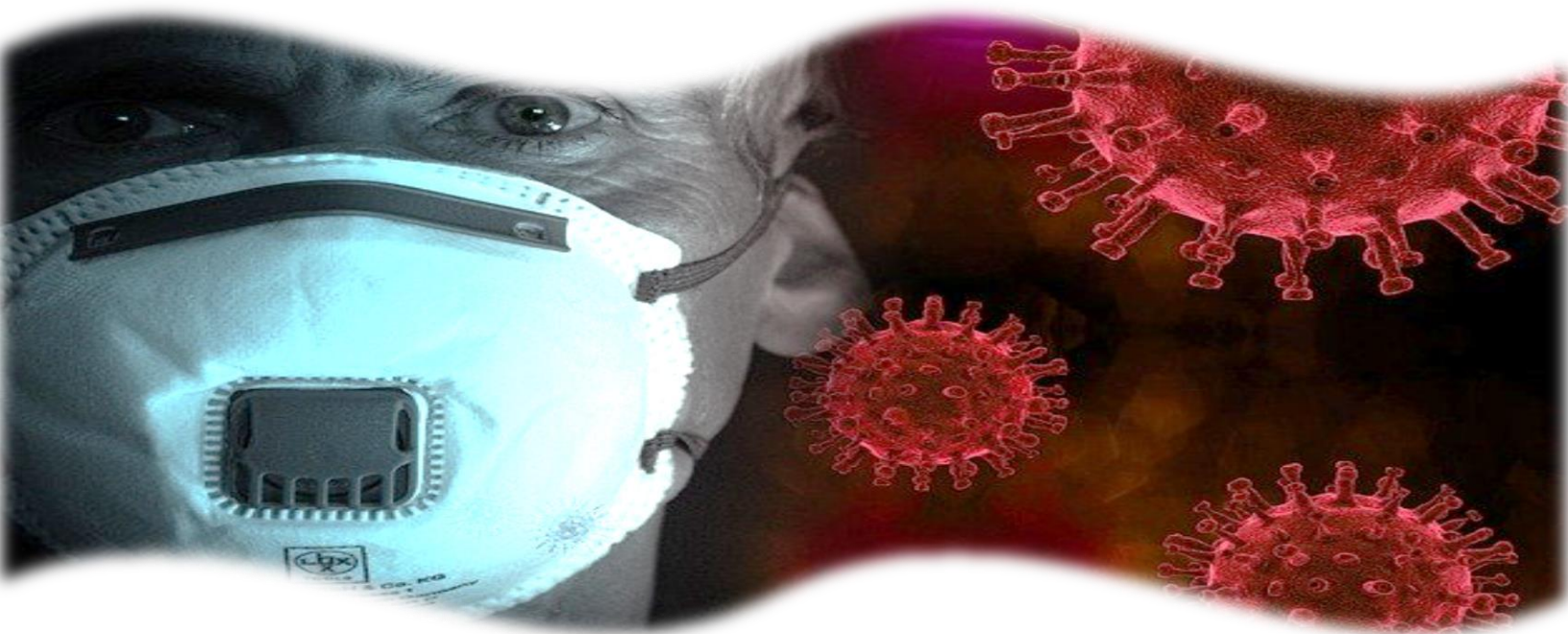


**IS THE CHURCH GOING THROUGH
THE GREAT TRIBULATION?
IS COVID THE BEGINNING
OF THE GREAT TRIBULATION?**



Paul Dan

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IS THE CHURCH GOING THROUGH THE GREAT TRIBULATION?

IS COVID THE BEGINNING OF THE GREAT TRIBULATION?

Let's have a quick search of the Scriptures on this essential topic for our time.

One Gospel, a dual emphasis

Look at what the apostle Paul has to say in Galatians 2:7-9. "...when they saw that the gospel for the uncircumcised had been committed to me, as the gospel for the circumcised was to Peter (for He who worked effectively in Peter for the apostleship to the circumcised also **worked effectively in me toward the Gentiles**), and when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that had been given to me, they gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, **that we should go to the Gentiles** and they to the circumcised."

So as the apostle Paul went on to minister to the Gentiles, the Holy Spirit developed a doctrine of the Church suitable for Gentiles. This aspect is essential in how we understand the doctrines of the New Testament, including things pertaining to the end times, which is called eschatology. On the other hand, Peter wrote to the Christian Jews. Notice how he specifically addresses the Jewish congregations: "To the pilgrims of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia..." (1 Peter 1:1). The *dispersion* in this sentence are the Christian Jews dispersed throughout the area he mentions in the verse.

One great confusion that needs to be clarified

Many people have not been properly assisted in their churches to make a distinction between Israel and the Church. For most Christians, the Church is Israel, and Israel is the Church. But Israel and the Church are not one and the same. Nevertheless, the Church is composed of Jews and Gentiles, but predominantly Gentiles. The specific needs of the Jewish church were addressed by Peter and James, who by the way, were the leaders of the church in Jerusalem. While, as we saw earlier, the doctrinal mandate for the Gentile church belongs to the apostle Paul. He wrote fourteen epistles to various churches, which comprise half of the New Testament. In Ephesians 3:2-11, Paul discloses that he received the stewardship in the mystery of Christ, which is the Church made up of Jews and Gentiles. Additionally, the doctrines of *the last things* (eschatology), regarding the Church, are found in the Pauline epistles. The eschatology for Israel is found in the *little apocalypse* written in the synoptic Gospels and the book of Revelation. So now, being equipped with the distinction between the Church and Israel, and the difference between the eschatology for the Church versus eschatology for Israel, we can proceed to investigate why the Church will not go through the Great Tribulation.

Where in the Pauline epistles do we find the eschatology of the Church?

There are three places where we find the eschatology of the Church

1. 1 Corinthians 15:50-58
2. 1 Thessalonians
3. 2 Thessalonians

It is noteworthy that out of fourteen Pauline epistles, two are eschatological in nature (1 and 2 Thessalonians). We will proceed to a textual analysis of those three sections.

What is Paul saying in 1 Corinthians 15:50-58 regarding the rapture of the church?

1. The rapture of the Church was a mystery, meaning it was not known in the Old Testament but was revealed to the apostle Paul as the apostle of the Gentiles. "Behold I tell you a mystery" (v. 51).
2. Not all believers will go to heaven through death; some will be changed in an unperishable body, putting on immortality. "...we shall be changed" (v. 51). The "changed" body makes us suitable for the rapture and eternity.
3. How fast will the change occur? "we shall be changed in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye" (v. 52). When will it take place? He says, "at the last trumpet" (v.52). Paul does not elaborate which trumpet that is, but he will re-discuss the entire doctrine of the rapture in 1 Thessalonians, where he addresses the trumpets also.

Important note: The rapture is not something that has never occurred in the history of humanity. We have the examples of Enoch and Elijah. "Enoch walked faithfully with God; then he was no more, because God took him away" (Gen 5:24). "As they were walking along and talking together, suddenly a chariot of fire and horses of fire appeared and separated the two of them, and Elijah went up to heaven in a whirlwind" (2 Kings 2:11).

The doctrine of the rapture in 1 Thessalonians

1 Thessalonians addresses a whole array of issues facing the church in Thessalonica, but a major topic is answering the questions about the afterlife from the believers in that church. As the apostle treats this subject, He introduces the Church and the rest of us to how the rapture will occur. Unique to this epistle, every chapter ends with a statement about the return of the Lord. We will deal with certain sections of the epistle relevant to our discussion. Let's keep in mind that "wrath" in 1 Thessalonians is the *Day of the Lord*, which is the Great Tribulation, not eternal damnation.

I think it is useful to list the verses from the end of the chapters which address the return of the Lord.

Chapter 1

"and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus who delivers us from *the wrath to come*." (1 Thess 1:10). Here we see that Jesus delivers us (the Church) from the Great Tribulation (wrath to come).

Chapter 2

"For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Is it not even you in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming?" (1 Thess 2:19). The believers of Thessalonica are the proof of the work of the apostle when Christ comes to rapture the Church. The rapture is followed by the evaluation and reward for the ministry of every believer.

Chapter 3

"so that He may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints" (1 Thess 3:13). True believers have hearts prepared in blamelessness and holiness for the coming of the Lord.

Chapter 4

“Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus, we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words” (1 Thess 4:17-18). We will treat this verse later.

Chapter 5

“Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful, who also will do it” (1 Thess 5:23-24). God Himself is extremely focused on the full sanctification of the saints in view of the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. A kind question: Do you see God at work in your life, sanctifying your spirit, soul and body, preparing you for the rapture?

The afterlife of the believers, resurrection, and rapture in 1 Thessalonians

The apostle Paul makes the following theological points in this section of 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18.

1. The resurrection of believers and the rapture are tied together! It is critical to understand that resurrection and rapture are fused together, they are back-to-back events. The idea of mid-tribulation rapture is complete nonsense. We see absolutely no clue of any resurrection in chapter 12 of Revelation on which mid-tribulation proponents build their case. Revelation 12 deals with Israel as the nation from whom the Lord came in His humanity.
2. The pagan world has no hope of ever seeing departed ones again, so they despair. But believers have a different perspective. “...you may not grieve as do the rest” (v. 13). The point is that believers grieve but they do not despair. They have hope.
3. The Lord Himself is the foundation of the teaching of the resurrection and rapture “if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus” (v. 14).
4. The apostle uses maximum authority in the following verse: “this we say to you by the Word of the Lord” (v. 15). The rapture event is not a theological speculation, it is the *very* Word of the Lord.
5. At the coming of the Lord, many will be asleep, but others will be alive. The dead in Christ have priority, meaning their resurrection occurs first. (v. 15).
6. “The Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout!” (v. 16). The Lord does not send angels to resurrect the saints, only the Lord has that power. There is a tender and emphatic note on the Lord Himself in this verse. We see His intense love and care for us.
7. When the Lord descends, He is accompanied by powerful heavenly hosts. A voice of an archangel and the trumpet of God will precede the resurrection of the dead in Christ. **This trumpet of God is a trumpet of the resurrection**, it has nothing to do with the seven trumpets of judgement from Revelation. Many people rush to correlate the trumpet of God in 1 Thessalonians with the trumpets of the angels in Revelation.
8. “Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus, we shall always be with the Lord” (v. 17). We notice the following: the dead who are resurrected and those who are alive will be caught up together. In the original language, the Greek word *harpázō* means “to seize by force; snatch up, suddenly and decisively.” So, the rapture is a sudden and decisive snatching of the believer to meet the

Lord in the air, and we will be always with the Lord. As the living ascend to heaven, they receive a glorified body. That aspect is treated in 1 Corinthians 15:51.

9. Verse 18 says that we should comfort one another with these words. The apostle doesn't say anything about believers being surrounded by the Great Tribulation at the moment of the rapture, or that the Lord will descend on the Earth as in the book of Revelation, or that the remaining humanity after the Great Tribulation will see Him. The rapture is a private event between the Lord and the Church.

The certainty of the rapture before the Great Tribulation is strengthened by this powerful verse

"For God has not destined us for wrath" (1 Thess 5:9). Remember as we pointed out at the beginning of this discussion that "wrath," in the context of 1 Thessalonians, is the Great Tribulation and not eternal damnation. So, we can paraphrase this verse in the following way: *For God has not destined us for the Great Tribulation*. Say a hallelujah with me! The church had its share of tribulation being persecuted, abused, tortured, and killed for almost 2,000 years in different parts of the world.

2 Thessalonians and the chronology of the events surrounding the rapture

It is important to know why 2 Thessalonians came into being. If we look in chapter 1 in just three verses such as 4, 5, and 6, we see that the apostle uses three words which describe the great difficulty terrifying the church. Those words are *persecutions*, *afflictions*, and *suffering*. The intensity of the trial was so big that the believers thought they were undergoing the Great Tribulation. They asked the apostle for help and he replied with this short epistle. In it, chapter 2 is vital because it elucidates the greatest question of the Thessalonians: *were they in the Great Tribulation already?* Remember, **contemporary tribulations are not the Great Tribulation!** The Lord Jesus specifically said: "For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been from the beginning of the world until now, no, and never will be. And if those days had not been cut short, no human being would be saved. But for the sake of the elect those days will be cut short."

We are going to follow the argument in chapter 2 by dividing the text into three sections:

1. Discerning truth despite spiritual deception (v. 1-2)
2. The chronology and the nature of the events surrounding the rapture (v. 3 - 12)
3. The assurance to the believers (v. 13 - 17)

Discerning truth despite spiritual deception

The Thessalonians not only suffered from persecution but were also under ideological attack. The apostle states that even an evil spirit can disseminate false information in their midst, or a message something like a rumor or a forged letter as coming from the apostolic team. What was the content of this misinformation? They were told by the imposters that the coming of the Lord Jesus and the rapture will be preceded by the Day of the Lord, like those who argue for a mid-tribulation rapture. The believers knew from the first epistle that they were not destined for the Day of the Lord which is the wrath of God. Yet the Thessalonians were quickly shaken from their composure and very disturbed by

this false rumor. The apostle appeals to them to dismiss all this spiritual treachery, and then offers them the chronology of the events surrounding the rapture, which will bring total peace to their souls.

The chronology and the nature of the events surrounding the rapture

In order for the Day of the Lord to occur, which is the Great Tribulation, two things have to take place. First, the great apostasy of the Church will occur (v. 3). Afterward the man of lawlessness who is also the son of destruction, will be revealed (v. 3). Those two titles in the previous sentence describe the Antichrist. So again, this is the chronology: 1. The great apostasy, 2. The revelation of Antichrist, and 3. The Great Tribulation.

The apostle introduces a clause in verse 6 which is *the restrainer*. He says, “and you know what restrains him now, so that in his time he may be revealed.” In the original language, to restrain means *to hold fast, to hold back*. So, while the apostasy does its work, the restrainer is fulfilling His role until the time comes for Antichrist to be revealed. In verses 7 and 8 we are told that when the restrainer is taken out of the way, the lawless one (Antichrist) will be revealed. The Lord will destroy the Antichrist by His coming. The apostle doesn’t explain what “His coming” is. The Holy Spirit chose to give John the mandate of detailing the Great Tribulation in the book of Revelation and elaborating on the second coming of the Lord to establish His Kingdom on Earth.

The question is, who is the restrainer? Some weak commentators claim that certain political leaders or governments are restraining the appearance of the Antichrist. That is ludicrous! It is obvious for every believer that the only one able to restrain the man of the devil is the Holy Spirit Himself. But the Holy Spirit is omnipresent so it’s improper to say that He will be taken out of the way. The answer is the Holy Spirit *in the Church* will be taken out of the way. The Church will be taken out of the way via the rapture. It is so evident from the first epistle that the Church will not be present in the Great Tribulation. The Church will not face the Antichrist. The Church will be with Christ in glory and accompany Him when He will establish His Kingdom on Earth.

The assurance to the believers

After the great disclosure of the chronology of the events surrounding the rapture, the apostle overwhelms the Church with encouragements, not with threats about how dreadful the Great Tribulation will be. Why? Because the Church will not face it. He reminds them that they are beloved by the Lord, they are chosen from the beginning for salvation and sanctification, so that they may gain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. He concludes by strongly urging them to hold to the teachings they received from him, assuring them that the Lord Jesus and God the Father gives to all believers eternal comfort and good hope by grace. Then he urges them to focus on good works and words, meaning returning to a life of activity without the terrors of the Great Tribulation.

Is COVID the beginning of the Great Tribulation? Is the vaccine the mark of the beast?

On both questions, the answer is a definite NO! The Great Tribulation and the mark of the beast necessitate the presence of the Antichrist. The mark of the beast is forced on humanity in Revelation 13, which is way into the Great Tribulation. As we saw in 2 Thessalonians 2, the Church is raptured before the Antichrist is revealed because the restrainer with the Church will be taken out of the way of the Antichrist. The Great Tribulation will be unleashed on the Antichrist and rebellious humanity, including apostate Israel. So, what is COVID? Everybody knows by now that COVID is a Chinese-made virus to advance the agenda of the Great Reset. The devilish Great Reset works to bring the Antichrist on the scene.

Where do we find the eschatology pertaining to Israel?

The best place to start is in the Gospel of Matthew where the Lord says the following:

“So, when you see standing in the holy place ‘the abomination that causes desolation,’ spoken of through the prophet Daniel—let the reader understand—then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains.” Matthew 24:15-16

The Lord Jesus, in the context of chapter 24, answers the questions of the disciples in relation to the future of the Temple and Israel. In the middle of His speech, Christ refers them back to the prophet Daniel. Why? Because Daniel is the most chronological prophet in the Old Testament who lays out precisely the succession of the key empires which will affect Israel, culminating with the empire of Antichrist who will try to destroy God’s people. Christ Himself will throw the Antichrist alive into the lake of fire, along with the false prophet. “But the beast was captured, and with it the false prophet who had performed the signs on its behalf. With these signs he had deluded those who had received the mark of the beast and worshiped its image. The two of them were thrown alive into the fiery lake of burning sulfur.” Revelation 19:20

“And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown. They will be tormented day and night for ever and ever.”
Revelation 20:10

We find the eschatology for Israel deeply rooted in the Old Testament, explained by the Lord Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew chapters 24-26, and then detailed by John in the book of Revelation.

The eschatology for the Jews is a somber one because they killed their own Messiah. Consequently, they were blinded by God, so the Church is a Gentile majority. The future for the Jewish people is dreadful, and only a remnant will be saved by the Lord Himself when He will descend on the Mount of Olives to destroy the Antichrist and His armies and establish the Millennial Kingdom on behalf of Israel.

In conclusion, we find the eschatology for Israel spread throughout the Old Testament in the prophecies of Isaiah, Ezekiel, Zechariah, Joel, Zephaniah, in the Gospels containing the mini apocalypse, and ending with the Great Apocalypse written by the apostle John in Revelation.