

# What The Apostle Paul Taught About The Return of Jesus

By Robert I. Adams

In this article, we are going to focus on what Paul wrote in 2 Thessalonians concerning the return of Jesus. The last part of chapter one and the first part of chapter two contain a continuous teaching by Paul of his core end-time teaching. Here is the passage:

“. . . it is a righteous thing with God to repay with tribulation those who trouble you, and to give you who are troubled rest with us when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power, when He comes, in that Day, to be glorified in His saints and to be admired among all those who believe . . . Now, brethren, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, we ask you, 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. 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, 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. Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you these things? And now you know what is restraining, that he may be revealed in his own time. 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. 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 coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders . . .”

The first question we have to ask ourselves is did Paul teach a two-stage return of Jesus? In other words, first that Jesus comes to evacuate believers from the world, and then either days, weeks, months or years later to touch down on earth with them? Paul uses the phrase “the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” and refers to it again as “His coming”. We cannot determine from this that Paul is teaching a two-stage return of Christ. His choice of words, and what he otherwise says in the passage, shows he is presenting one future coming of Christ.

What does Paul say will happen at the coming of the Lord? First, he writes of the “gathering together” of the believers when Jesus comes, and their being given rest from those who trouble them. In addition, Paul writes that when Jesus comes He will destroy a person called “the man of sin” (a.k.a. the Antichrist). Paul also writes that when Jesus comes He will take vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel.

What can we deduce from the above? Well, since Paul says Jesus will destroy the Antichrist when He comes, this means the Antichrist will arise and have power on the earth before Jesus comes. Paul underlines this by saying, "the day of Christ ... will not come unless ... the man of sin is revealed". So, first the Antichrist must be revealed, but before he is revealed, Paul says that "He who now restrains" must no longer restrain ('step aside', so to speak) in order that the Antichrist can rise to power. The book of Revelation tells us the Antichrist will have power at the time of the great tribulation (Rev. 13, cf. Rev. 7). Therefore, Paul is saying Jesus will come after the great tribulation.

The second thing we can deduce is that because Paul says the believers will be gathered to Jesus when He comes, and His coming happens after the great tribulation, Paul is saying this gathering to Jesus will happen after the great tribulation. This comes across by Paul saying that when Jesus comes He will give rest to the believers who are being "troubled" due to "persecutions and tribulations" that Paul mentioned a couple of verses beforehand. Paul says plainly the believers will be given rest when Jesus is "revealed from heaven" with His angels. In alignment with this, Jesus said He will come with all His angels after the great tribulation when He gathers his own (Matt. 24:29-31; cf. Matt. 25:31). Paul wrote more about the gathering of the believers at the coming of Jesus in his first letter to the Thessalonians. In chapter 4, he wrote about this in connection with his teaching on the dead in Christ:

"But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus. For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. 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."

In this passage, we note that Paul says these things will happen at "the coming of the Lord". In addition, we also see that Paul does not say Jesus will return to heaven with the resurrected and glorified believers he has gathered to Himself in the air. From what Paul writes in 2 Thessalonians, we can deduct that the believers who are caught up to meet Jesus in the clouds will accompany Him when He proceeds to descend to earth, destroy the Antichrist, and take vengeance on those who have opposed the gospel and troubled the believers.

In case you have some queries about this, I have compiled answers to the most frequently asked questions about the Bible's teaching on the return of Jesus in my book "The Approaching Apocalypse" (also available in e-book format). You are welcome to look at it at [Amazon](#).