

SESSION 10

end-time sovereignty

SCRIPTURE FOCUS

2 Thess. 2:1–12

BUILDUP THEME



LEARN DOCTRINE

God will work His plan for the future according to His revealed Word.

MEASURABLE RESPONSE

Students will recognize that God controls end-time events as well as their own lives.

MEMORY VERSE

“And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming” (2 Thess. 2:8).

Teacher Preparation

- ☐ Recall a time when you realized you had no control over the events in your life. How did such a time affect your faith?
- ☐ Read 2 Thessalonians 2:1–12. Paul reminded the suffering Thessalonians of events that will occur once the Day of the Lord begins. None of the events he listed were currently happening. So, the Thessalonians weren’t experiencing the Tribulation and hadn’t missed the Rapture.
- ☐ Paul’s teaching emphasized God’s sovereignty. God will work His plan according to His Word. His teaching serves as a reminder that God is sovereign over our lives too. We can trust Him and lean on Him for help and direction when we doubt.
- ☐ Students may have anxieties about the future or confusion about end-time events. This session will strengthen their understanding of God’s plan for the end. As you teach, lead them to trust God for their futures too.

Session Summary

Paul instructed the Thessalonians not to be deceived or troubled by a false teaching that they had missed the Rapture and were living in the Tribulation. Paul presented evidence that the Rapture hadn’t happened. First, the great apostasy at the beginning of the Tribulation hadn’t happened yet. Second, the Antichrist hadn’t been revealed. Third, the Restrainer hadn’t been removed. Fourth, God hadn’t yet defeated the Antichrist. And fifth, God had not yet sent the strong delusion that will characterize the Tribulation. Because God is in control of all things, including end-time events, we can move forward in faith with confidence in the future.

Session Starters

Option 1—Important Events

Steps

1. Talk about missing important events.

ASK: To what lengths have you gone to ensure you could attend an important life event for a friend or family member?

ASK: What have you not been able to attend someone's important life event? How did you respond?

2. Transition to the Bible study.

Missing an important life event can be disappointing, even depressing. Imagine if we all missed the Rapture. The Thessalonians thought they missed Christ's return. They were quite distressed. Paul wrote to reassure them. His instruction about the Day of the Lord can give us confidence in God's control of the future and remind us of His sovereignty over our lives.

Option 2—Out of Order

Steps

1. Discuss feeling as if life is happening out of order.

ASK: When have you felt like the events in your life were happening out of order?

ASK: What did the unexpected order teach you about trusting God?

2. Transition to the Bible study.

Most things in life have a natural order of progression. We know what has to happen before events occur. Although Paul had already instructed the Thessalonians about the Day of the Lord, false teachers confused their understanding about the order of end-time events. Paul reminded them that God is in control and has a definite plan for the last days. This session will remind us of God's sovereignty over all of life.

Bible Study

Gather

- Tribulation Events poster.

I. Instructions Concerning the Rapture (2 Thess. 2:1–3a)

A. Don't be worried (2:1, 2a)

Paul continued to correct the Thessalonians' misunderstandings concerning the Rapture. Some of them were convinced that the Day of the Lord had arrived and that they had missed the Rapture.

READ: 2 Thessalonians 2:1, 2a.

In his first letter, Paul taught the Thessalonians that the Rapture is Christ's return to gather believers in the clouds (1 Thess. 4:17). In his second letter, Paul asked them to cling to the doctrine he taught and not be swayed by any false ideas. He wanted the Thessalonians to listen carefully and to understand the true doctrine.

ASK: Why might Satan want to confuse believers concerning end times? (Q3) *To make them uncertain so they will be distracted from their mission to make disciples; to cause them to doubt God's Word.*

Paul urged the Thessalonians not to be "shaken in mind" or to be troubled and fearful. They had become easily disturbed by false doctrines. They were alarmed and may have seen their persecution as evidence that the Day of the Lord had begun. The Day of the Lord includes all the end-time events from the Rapture until God establishes His eternal reign on a new earth. The Thessalonians were worried they had missed the Rapture, meaning they would have to go through the terrors of the Tribulation. But no true believers in Christ will miss the Rapture. That should never be our worry.

B. Don't be fooled (2:2b, 3a)

READ: 2 Thessalonians 2:2, 3a.

Paul addressed the three typical sources of doctrinal confusion. The first is deception by "spirit." Perhaps a false teacher had claimed to be speaking new doctrines by inspiration from the Holy Spirit. By "word," the second possibility, referred to public teaching or preaching. A false teacher might have claimed his new doctrine had come directly from Paul. "Letter" probably referred to a forged letter that appeared to be from Paul but contained false doctrines.

Paul told the Thessalonians to let no one deceive them by spirit, word, or letter. God's Word is always the believer's source for truth about end-time events and all other doctrines.

Some believers have said there is no way to know what God has generally planned for the end times. They point out that good scholars don't agree on what will happen and when. So, they focus on the consummation of all things in eternity and don't teach about the Rapture, Tribulation, and Kingdom.

The reason for the different views concerning end-time events comes down to interpretation of Scripture. If passages like 1 and 2 Thessalonians are interpreted literally (normally), then there isn't confusion about end-time events. Believers who interpret some passages according to its plain meaning and other passages according to a spiritualized meaning cause uncertainty and confusion.

ASK: Why would God want us to know about major end-time events and the order in which they will take place? (Q4) *So we can live confidently and with anticipation of Christ's return; because Christ will judge our earthly lives and reward us accordingly; because truth about the end times helps to establish God's faithfulness.*

II. Evidence the Rapture Is Still Future (2 Thess. 2:3b–12)

The Thessalonians were worried they had missed the Rapture and were experiencing the terrible Tribulation. So, Paul reviewed his previous teaching concerning the coming of the Day of the Lord, which will begin with the Rapture. Paul laid out evidence that the Rapture is still future by describing what will happen in the Tribulation. The Thessalonians could conclude from his teaching that their present persecution wasn't part of the Tribulation.



DISPLAY: Tribulation Events poster. The timeline poster will help your students understand what events and people Paul is talking about in 2 Thessalonians 2:1–12. Paul refers to several events and different individuals but not in chronological order.

A. The apostasy hasn't happened (2:3b)

Paul explained that certain events, which had not yet come to pass, would be part of the Tribulation and would be signs the Rapture had happened and the Tribulation had begun.

READ: 2 Thessalonians 2:3b.

"Apostasy" is a combination of the Greek preposition "away from" and the verb for "stand." Professing believers who never sincerely trusted Christ will take a stand away from God during the Tribulation.

At the time of the Rapture, there will be people who claim to be Christians but aren't true believers. After the Rapture, many of these false Christians will no longer claim to follow Christ, especially when they observe new believers being persecuted for their faith. From the perspective of unbelievers, such insincere professing Christians will rebel against God and walk away from the Christian religion. In reality, they will have never trusted in Christ. These insincere professing Christians will join unbelievers in an anti-God movement known as the apostasy. The Antichrist, Satan's human leader, will become the anti-God leader over the course of the Tribulation.

ASK: When should a professing Christian make sure of his or her salvation? (Q5) *Now! There is no guarantee an unsaved professing Christian will trust in Christ after the Rapture happens.*

B. God hasn't revealed the Antichrist (2:3c–5)

READ: 2 Thessalonians 2:3.

Leading the anti-God rebellion is the man of sin. He will reject God's law in favor of lawlessness. He is called the Antichrist and the son of perdition, meaning that he is doomed to destruction. He will be empowered by Satan, giving him worldwide attention and authority. Israel will initially see Antichrist as an ally and even as their Messiah. They will sign a peace treaty with him at the beginning of the Tribulation, putting their faith in him as their deliverer from other aggressive nations (Dan. 9:27). But his friendliness toward Israel will simply be an act to position himself to control Israel and conquer the world.

READ: 2 Thessalonians 2:4.

In the middle of the Tribulation, the Antichrist will reveal his true nature and break his treaty with Israel. He will enter the rebuilt temple in Jerusalem and desecrate it, meaning he will make a profane sacrifice on its altar and set himself up as God in the temple (Dan. 9:27). He will ruin the temple and begin to persecute the Jews, causing them to run for their lives (Matt. 24:15–21).

READ: 2 Thessalonians 2:5.

The Thessalonians had failed to trust that Paul's teachings were from Christ. They began to believe deceptive false teachers instead. Their failure demonstrates the power of convincing and seemingly credible false teaching.

ASK: How can believers best protect themselves from false teaching that sounds credible? (Q6) *By studying God's Word and always comparing any teaching with what God's Word says.*

C. God hasn't removed the Restrainer (2:6, 7)

The Antichrist had not yet been revealed because some power, a restrainer, was holding him back.

READ: 2 Thessalonians 2:6.

The Antichrist will not be revealed until God is ready to remove the Restrainer. So, once God removes the restraining power, the Antichrist will rise in power.

READ: 2 Thessalonians 2:7.

The Antichrist's identity remains hidden for now, but the lawlessness that will characterize the Antichrist is already at work in the world. We can clearly see his influence through people's behavior and attitudes in the world.

ASK: What lawless activities in the world today might reflect what

the Antichrist will promote and do? (Q7) *Growing antisemitism, persecution of Christians, labeling of Christians as terrorists, loss of the sanctity of life, increased focus on identity and individual rights, brutal treatment of enemies.*

The Restrainer is probably the Holy Spirit. The Spirit's presence in believers has a restraining ministry in the world. After the Rapture, the Spirit will still be present on earth, but His restraining ministry through the church will no longer be at work.

As we submit to the Holy Spirit's work in our lives, He works through us to hold back the power of sin and lawlessness in the world. And as we gather together in churches, the Spirit works through us to help each other grow in our ability to impact our world for Christ (Eph. 4:11–16).

ASK: When have you seen the Spirit use you to restrain sin in the world? (Q8)

D. God hasn't defeated the Antichrist (2:8)

Once Spirit-filled believers have left the earth, Satan will take the opportunity to bring the Antichrist to power. The world will be on edge after the Rapture and looking for hope. The Antichrist will give them reasons to trust in him. But that hope will be short-lived.

READ: 2 Thessalonians 2:8.

The Antichrist's rule will build over the course of the Tribulation. He will have enemies that will gather to war with him, but they will unite to attack Christ as He returns to earth at the Second Coming. There will be no contest. Christ will effortlessly destroy the Antichrist with His words and with the brightness of His appearance.

READ: Revelation 19:17–20. **ASK:** Describe God's control over the Antichrist. (Q9) *The Antichrist is absolutely subject to God's control; he won't rise to power until God is ready, and he won't escape when Christ returns to put him to death.*

E. God hasn't sent the strong delusion (2:9–12)

Paul finished his evidence that the Rapture hadn't happened by backing up from the previous verse to describe the Antichrist's rise to power and the coming of a strong delusion (deception) during the Tribulation.

READ: 2 Thessalonians 2:9.

The Antichrist will rise by Satan's power and under Satan's authority. But he won't present himself as an evil dictator—at least not initially. The Antichrist will have a false prophet who will do powerful tricks and signs that will convince people to worship the Antichrist as deity (Rev. 13:11–15). Even the Jews will think the Antichrist must be their Messiah.

READ: 2 Thessalonians 2:10.

The Antichrist and his false prophet will deceive unbelievers into worshiping the Antichrist. At some point during the Tribulation, they will have received the Antichrist's mark on their right hand or forehead as a sign of their allegiance to him and their final rejection of God. That mark is likely associated with "666," the number of the Antichrist's false prophet (Rev. 13:16–18). Unbelievers who pledge their allegiance to the Antichrist will perish because they didn't believe the gospel.

ASK: Unbelievers will refuse to love God's truth, the truth of the gospel (2 Thess. 2:10). Why did Paul say "love" the truth instead of "believe"? (Q10) *There could be no greater demonstration of love than God's love in sending His Son to die for the world. To reject the gospel is to say "no" to God's great love.*

READ: 2 Thessalonians 2:11, 12.

Unbelievers who choose to reject God and receive the mark of the Antichrist during the Tribulation will not change their minds. God will allow a strong deception to overtake their thinking, meaning they will believe the Antichrist's lie that God is their enemy. They will commit themselves to unrighteousness (all kinds of wickedness) and resolve to reject God's saving grace.

Revelation 19:17–20 reveals that Christ will kill the Antichrist and the false prophet. Verse 21 describes the fate of those who will reject God and pledge their loyalty to the Antichrist.

READ: Revelation 19:21.

At His return, Christ will condemn to death all unbelievers from the Tribulation. He will kill them with a sword that proceeds from His mouth, meaning He will kill them with His words. The unbelievers' dead bodies will be food for countless birds of prey.

The rise and fall of the Antichrist will be unmistakable. The Thessalonians undoubtedly agreed that no such figure had arisen and fallen, meaning they were not living in the Tribulation.

ASK: What is your response to reading about the demise of the Antichrist and the lost who choose to reject God? (Q11)

ASK: What should you do with the truth about the demise of the Antichrist and the lost? (Q12)

Session Application

Gather

- Note cards and pens.

Steps

1. Talk about facing the future.

ASK: How might anxiety about the future hinder our progress as believers? (Q13) *Fear of failure may keep us from serving God; worrying about things we can't control may bring unnecessary distress; anxiety keeps us from enjoying God's blessings.*

ASK: What about the future, if anything, causes you anxiety? (Q14)

ASK: Name truths about God that give you comfort and confidence as you face the future. (Q15)

2. Pray that your students will trust God to control the end times as well as the details of their futures.