

=THE EPISTLES=

Lesson 9

Paul's Second Epistle to the Thessalonians

AIM: to teach my pupils the general teaching of the book of II Thessalonians.

POINT OF CONTACT: Ask the class members if they are premillennialists or postmillennialists. See how many know what they are, and then remind them that later in the lesson this will be explained more thoroughly.

INTRODUCTION: The second Epistle to the Thessalonians was written shortly after the first Epistle. You will recall that though Paul was in Thessalonica only three Sabbath days, he had taught them about the coming of the Lord. After he left, they became worried because some had died. They did not know how the coming of the Lord would affect the dead in Christ. They wrote Paul and told him of their concern. He in turn wrote them the book of I Thessalonians, explaining what would happen to the dead in Christ; hence, the first Epistle was written to explain the events relating to the dead in Christ at the Rapture. It is basically a book dealing with the Rapture.

Another problem arose, however. Paul had told them much of the coming of the Lord, but some of it obviously did not "soak in." The Epistle of II Thessalonians was probably carried back to the Thessalonian people by the same messenger who carried I Thessalonians. It is to explain another problem concerning the return of the Lord. Let us look at this problem and its explanation.

- I. THEIR CONCERN. They had been taught about the Tribulation Period. They had been taught that a time of terrible trouble would come and that this time would be after the Rapture. However, since persecution and trouble came to them, they began to fret that perhaps they were already suffering the Tribulation Period, from which they had been taught to expect deliverance by the Rapture. You will notice in II Thessalonians 2:2 that Paul writes to tell them not to be "soon shaken in mind, or be troubled." He was alleviating their worries and explaining to them not to be afraid that the Second Coming of Christ to the earth was at hand and that they were already in the Tribulation Period.
- II. PAUL'S COMPLETE EXPLANATION. Notice in II Thessalonians 2:3 he reminds them that the Day of the Lord, or the Second Coming of Christ to the earth, or the Revelation which takes place at the end of the Tribulation, could not come until there comes a falling away. The words "falling away" have to do with the Rapture. Actually, it means the "calling out." Paul was simply reminding them that the Tribulation would not come and could not come until first the Rapture had taken place. He assures them that they are not now in the Tribulation Period and that the suffering and persecution that they are now enduring has nothing to do with the Tribulation Period, for the Tribulation cannot come until this "falling away" or Rapture takes place.

There is a dangerous teaching becoming popular today which is called the "post-Tribulation Rapture." This teaching is that Jesus cannot come for His own and the Rapture will not take place until after the Tribulation. This, of course, could not be true because the Coming of the Lord could take place at any minute; and if He could not come until after the Tribulation, then He could not come now. Neither could He come until all of the events of Revelation 4 through 18 take place. This would take the imminence away from the coming of the Lord Jesus.

- III. THE REVEALING OF THE ANTICHRIST AND THE TRIBULATION PERIOD. Notice the last part of II Thessalonians 2:3. As soon as the "falling away" or the "calling out" of the Rapture takes place, the man of sin is revealed. This man of sin is the Antichrist, the world dictator, who shall be the political leader of the world during the Tribulation Period. Paul is simply saying that as soon as the Rapture takes place, then starts the Tribulation Period, which lasts seven years. This period will be the revealing of the Antichrist or the man of sin. He is described in verse 4.

- IV. PAUL THEN REMINDS US THAT AT THE END OF THIS SEVEN-YEAR PERIOD, CHRIST WILL RETURN TO THE EARTH WITH HIS OWN. Notice II Thessalonians 2:7, 8. We find the Rapture in verse 7 where it says, “He who now letteth [hindereth] will let [hinder], until he be taken out of the way.” This is the Holy Spirit. His being taken out of the way is the Rapture. Notice that immediately the Wicked One shall be revealed; and at the end of the Tribulation Period, the Lord shall consume him with the Spirit of His mouth and destroy him with the brightness of His coming. This is when Jesus comes with His own.

To summarize a little more clearly, remember the outline: He came in Bethlehem to His own; He is coming in the air for His own; He is coming seven years later with His own. The Thessalonians were afraid that perhaps He had come for His own and they were left to enter the Tribulation Period. This, of course, alarmed them. They knew that Paul had taught them that the Rapture was to take place before the Tribulation Period. Thinking they were in the Tribulation Period, they became alarmed and were fearing that Jesus would soon come with His own. Paul reminded them that the Tribulation would not take place until after Jesus had come for His own; then the Tribulation would take place along with the revealing of the man of sin, after which Jesus will come with His own to put down the Antichrist and establish His kingdom of peace on the earth.

It might be wise to explain premillennialism and postmillennialism here. The Millennium is the thousand-year reign of Christ on the earth, which takes place when Jesus comes with His own at the end of the Tribulation Period. For many years there was a teaching called “postmillennialism.” “Post” means “after.” This teaching was that the church and preaching and social work would make the world better and better and usher in a kingdom on earth. This kingdom would last a thousand years, and then at the end of this kingdom Jesus would come back to earth. This theory taught that the world would get better and better. Since the world has not gotten better and better, but worse and worse, and since the Scriptures teach that this is what will continue to happen, postmillennialism is passing off the scene. Premillennialism teaches that Jesus will come before the kingdom and that He Himself will establish the kingdom. Their theory is, “How can you have a kingdom without the King?”

- V. PAUL IS SIMPLY SUMMARIZING PROPHETIC EVENTS.

- VI. PAUL’S CONCERN FOR THE LOST. (II Thessalonians 2:9-12) This is a very interesting passage. Paul is teaching here that all people who have heard the Gospel and refused it before the Rapture will be sent delusions. Their eyes will be blinded, and they will not have a chance to be saved after the Rapture. Many will be saved during the Tribulation Period but none who heard the Gospel before the Rapture. Paul is simply sounding out the urgency that people need to be saved at once, for if the Rapture takes place, all who have heard the Gospel and rejected it will have no chance at salvation.