

WHO IS THE RESTRAINER? RAPTURE, THE ANTICHRIST AND THE GATHERING.

Whereas the scripture does not name the restrainer of the antichrist, it has been suggested by some scholars that the church is this restrainer and must, therefore, be taken away in a rapture before he is revealed, consequently implying a pre-tribulation or mid-tribulation rapture.

Let us examine the relevant scriptures on this matter.

2 Thessalonians 2:1-8, ESV.

Now concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered together to him, we ask you, brothers, 2 not to be quickly shaken in mind or alarmed, either by a spirit or a spoken word, or a letter seeming to be from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come. 3 Let no one deceive you in any way. For that day will not come, unless the rebellion comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, 4 who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God. 5 Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you these things? 6 And you know what is restraining him now so that he may be revealed in his time. 7 For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work. Only he who now restrains it will do so until he is out of the way. 8 And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will kill with the breath of his mouth and bring to nothing by the appearance of his coming.

We first discuss verses 1-3. These verses explain to us three major events of the end times, namely:

1. The revealing of the man of sin/lawlessness, who is, elsewhere, known as the antichrist or figuratively called the beast (See *1 John 2:18; Revelation 13:1-7*).
2. The coming of Christ
3. Our being gathered together to Him

We are told that:

- a) The Day of the Lord is defined to include, among other events, His coming and our being gathered to Him, and that
- b) Day cannot come before the antichrist is revealed.

So this shows that of the above three events, the antichrist must first be revealed. Therefore (1) comes first. This rules out the possibility of the pre-tribulation rapture because:

- i. Our being gathered unto Christ cannot be defined to exclude rapture and yet we are told that the rapture and the coming of Christ both take place after the man of sin is revealed.
- ii. The man of sin is the one who causes the great tribulation when he sits in the temple proclaiming himself to be God, which takes place in the middle of his 7 year peace treaty with Israel (*Daniel 9:27*).

We are now left with two options of mid-tribulation and post-tribulation rapture. The order of (2) and (3) are not clear from this scripture therefore we can now refer in another place where the coming of Christ and our being gathered to Him are spoken of:

Matthew 24:29-30, NKJV.

"Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. 30 Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. 31 And he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.

This scripture gives us the three events in the following order:

1. The great tribulation (revealing of the antichrist)
2. The coming of Christ
3. Our being gathered unto Him: *And he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.*

This order fits in well with other passages of scripture, for example,

- a) The gathering is done by angels using trumpets at the four corners of the earth (*Matthew 24:31, Mark 13:27, 1 Thes. 4:15-17*)
- b) *Revelation 6:12-7:1* agrees on angels being sent to the four corners of the earth with trumpets after Christ is revealed
- c) Seven angels are sent out to blow trumpets in *Revelation 8-10*
- d) John and Paul agree that the rapture takes place at the last (7th) trumpet (*1 Cor. 15:51; Rev. 10:7*)

This rules out the mid-tribulation rapture option and we are left with the post-tribulation rapture as the only valid perspective.

We now look at *verses 4-8*.

4 who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God. 5 Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you these things? 6 And you know what is restraining him now so that he may be revealed in his time. 7 For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work. Only he who now restrains it will do so until he is out of the way. 8 And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will kill with the breath of his mouth and bring to nothing by the appearance of his coming.

We note that:

- i. There is one who restrains the antichrist from being revealed so that he is revealed in his proper time
- ii. He will continue to do so until he is taken out of the way
- iii. We are not told who this restrainer is
- iv. No other Bible author speaks about this restrainer

It has been suggested by some scholars that the church is this restrainer of the antichrist and must, therefore, be taken away in a rapture before he is revealed, consequently supporting a pre-tribulation or mid-tribulation rapture. We further observe that if we assume that this is true, then:

- a) It contradicts the very same breathe and context of the scripture, given that *verses 1-3*, as explained above, show that rapture comes last of the three given events. Given that the restrainer is not named in the scriptures, we should, therefore, not be seen to be conjuring up, out of our curiosity, an interpretation of who the restrainer is (*verses 5-7*), in a way that overturns the context.
- b) But just in case the restrainer is the church, the scripture does say that the restrainer is taken away but is taken *out of the way*. The assertion of the church being raptured here is not given by scripture but rather merely by suggested by scholars.
- c) Whereas there is no scripture that expressly says, the church will be raptured before the great tribulation, there are several that say saints will be on earth during the great tribulation and must patiently go through it (*Daniel 7:25; Matthew 24:22; Rev. 7:13-14; 13:7*).

It is therefore not doctrinally sustainable to allege that the restrainer will be taken away yet the scripture says he will just be taken out of the way (or rather put in a position where he can't hinder anymore); and so we cannot then blindly proceed to build a big

mountain of doctrine on such a sketchy and flimsy foundation like this. That would not only be erroneous and misleading, but irresponsible of a teacher or scholar.

This and many other articles and books I've written demonstrate beyond a shade of doubt that the rapture of the church will take place after the great tribulation and the appearance of the son of man. Right now, the odds are against the church – whereas the next major event in Bible end time prophecy is the great tribulation, many are expecting the rapture. The earlier the entire church realizes that very soon, as many as will remain alive, will go through the great tribulation, the better prepared we will try to be, not only spiritually but practically. May God bless you with wisdom and power to do the right things. In Jesus' name.

Feedback and wisdom is highly welcome so that we can throw more light on this subject as and when required. God's blessings ~ **Gideon Wananda**