

## **The Book Of Revelation.**

### **Week 9.**

#### **Matthew 24**

#### **2 Thessalonians Chapter 2**

#### **Deception And The Great Apostasy.**

Amidst all the terrifying events of the tribulation, one event stands out among them all, because the outcome of this is surely eternal. As Jesus said, don't fear those who can kill your body, but fear the one who can destroy both your body and soul in hell.

This event is the great apostasy. It is not even mentioned in the book of Revelation. The first mention of this is in Matthew 24. Later this is expanded on by Paul.

But first let's define the word "apostasy". It is the abandonment of a previous loyalty, or a renunciation of a religious or political belief or principle, so that the apostate refuses to continue to follow, obey or recognize what they previously believed in.

The word takes its root from the phrase "to stand away from". To rebel, revolt or defect. The inference is that the person was a loyal follower before they fell away.

#### **Let's Look At What Jesus Had To Say About It.**

##### **Matthew 24 verse 9 to 13.**

Then you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me. At that time, many will turn away from the faith, and will betray and hate each other, and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people. Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold, but the one who stands firm to the end will be saved.

These verses tell us that this apostasy will happen as extreme persecution and hatred by all nations becomes commonplace. For this sole reason, we can determine that the various issues facing the church in the here and now do not represent the great apostasy, no matter how serious those issues are.

#### **Now Let's Look At Paul.**

##### **2 Thessalonians chapter 2 verses 1 to 3.**

Concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to him, we ask you brothers and sisters, not to become easily unsettled or alarmed by the teaching allegedly from us, asserting that the day of the Lord has already come.

Don't let anyone deceive you in that way, for that day will not come until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the man doomed to destruction.

The word "rebellion" is used instead of "apostasy" here, but it means the same thing. Paul appears to group together the apostasy with the appearance of the antichrist.

This is not a surprise, because Revelation chapter 12 says that the antichrist will persecute not only the Jews but also those who keep God's commands and hold fast to the testimony of Jesus.

So you can see that Paul is most likely describing the same scenario as Jesus. There will be intense persecution, and at that time, many will desert their faith. So now we come to the question. Why would loyal followers of Jesus abandon their faith when under intense persecution?

### **Would You Abandon Your Faith To Protect Your Life?**

These are they who loved their lives more than they loved Jesus. That is in stark contrast to the believers of Revelation chapter 12 verse 11, which says "They defeated him because of the Lamb's blood and because of the message of their witness. Even when facing death they did not cling to life.

The topic of martyrdom is not a popular message in the modern church of the West. Our forefathers went through persecution in this country when the church broke away from the Roman Catholics, but in this modern day, we in the West are living in relative comfort and safety.

What are the various scenarios that could lead to apostasy if the antichrist threatens the lives of believers?

### **Nominal Christians.**

Firstly there will be nominal Christians, or those who have a liberal view of the gospel. When the antichrist and his followers bring these people face to face with the challenge to deny their faith or die, they may accept the religion of the antichrist, and may even feel that it is an inclusive gesture to do so, or at least believe that it will guarantee their safety to accept his religion.

### **Christians Hiding Sin.**

Others will have strongholds of sin, and in this hour of extreme pressure, may simply bow to the pressure to hide away in the pursuit of pleasure, rather than standing for one's faith, if that may lead to being killed. They won't wait to be challenged to deny their faith, they will voluntarily vote with their feet, taking the broad way to destruction.

### **Fearful Christians.**

Then there maybe those who understand completely that the tribulation period is unfolding, but through lack of prayer, and being starved of God's word, do not have the strength or courage to stand for their faith, or cannot bear to leave their families, and so buckle to the pressure to deny their faith.

### **Deceived Christians.**

Lastly, there will also be those who may be strong believers, but simply did not realize that end times were very close, or had a view of the rapture which led them to believe they would not have to face the persecution of the antichrist.

Therefore they may not be able to conceive that they are in the final tribulation period. We are now going to unpack the range of issues facing those who hold a pre-trib rapture view, and how that would play out, and lead to great deception and a falling away from the faith, if in fact their view is incorrect.

### **Denial.**

Let's play forward what could happen in the minds of pre-trib adherents when the tribulation period begins. If they hold this view strongly, pre-trib adherents will probably deny that the tribulation period has in fact begun, as they have not yet been raptured.

Teachers of this position will most likely provide explanations for the current events, and assure their listeners that the world is just going through some birth pains, but that it cannot be the tribulation. Also, many have a very fixed idea on the origin of the antichrist. It has been taught for many years that he will come from a revived Roman empire, so they will be expecting a leader of a European conglomerate of nations.

If the antichrist arises from the Middle East, many will not recognize that the first seal has been opened. Remember, the antichrist will not appear with a name tag, making him instantly recognizable.

### **Lights On.**

As the tribulation period progresses through the first four seals, food prices will rise to astronomical heights, and through war, random killing, famine and plagues, a quarter of the world's population will die.

At this point, the penny will drop for many pre-trib adherents. They will at last realize that the tribulation period is in full swing. You would think it will be easy for them to re-align with correct biblical end times teaching, but it will not be so simple.

### **Confusion.**

Here is where it could get worse for the pre-trib adherent. Imagine you are that person for a moment. The conundrum is this. Did the rapture happen just before the tribulation period started, in which case, I have been left behind? Or, have my pre-trib teachers been wrong all this time, which would explain why I am still on earth during the Tribulation period?

### **Perceived Rejection By God.**

In the above scenario, let's consider the former option, the belief that the rapture has happened already, and I have been left behind. I could arrive at this assumption if some of my Christian friends seem to have disappeared off the face of the earth, but unbeknown to me, they have been martyred by antichrist forces.

I now have to struggle with rejection. In this case, I would have ample opportunity to walk away from God, as I process the assumption that they were raptured, and I was left behind! This assumption would cause me to believe that my temperature was not hot enough for the saviour, who has vomited me out of his mouth, and therefore I have been left behind. This could cause me to give up on my faith.

### **Offence Taken Against The Church.**

Some pre-trib adherents, however, will finally understand that the rapture did not happen, and those dear friends who have disappeared have in fact been martyred. But it will not be an easy job to reconcile this.

It would mean that many of the ministries I followed on youtube, and in my local church, were completely wrong about the rapture. Now that the Tribulation Period is here, I am confused, feeling rejected, and don't know which ministry I can trust. I may even isolate from Church. Ultimately this could cause many to give up on their faith.

### **A Simple Comparison of Pre-Trib and Post-Trib views.**

The post tribulation rapture view gives you these advantages.

1. It is more directly evidenced from scripture.
2. If wrong, it does not put you through any misery.
3. If right, this view prepares you for the severe persecution ahead.
4. In short, it is a win win scenario

The pre tribulation rapture view gives you these disadvantages.

1. The scriptural evidence is weak, and always made through inference.
2. If wrong, it will cause a lot of confusion and doubt during the tribulation period.

The concerning reality is that the majority of end times ministries take the pre-trib view. Nearly all of these ministries are wholehearted champions for God. Many are brave and humble, worthy of their leadership, but for whatever reason, have chosen to follow and teach the pre-trib rapture narrative.

Therefore the fraction of the church exposed to the post-trib narrative is small by comparison, and hence the real concern is that many Christians may experience great deception when the tribulation period starts.

It is possible that during this time of intense persecution, church organizations may, close down, if the local church proves to be an easy terrorist target for followers of the antichrist. In that atmosphere, it will be easy for believers to be isolated and deceived, as false prophets will be on the rise, as the situation escalates.

### **Would You Abandon Your Faith To Protect Your Cash Flow?**

The mark of the beast is rolled out by the false prophet at some point during the antichrist reign. Judging by the timing of the message preached by the third of the three angels in Revelation chapter 14, it is possible that the mark of the beast will be rolled out toward the end of this period, after the trumpets but before the bowls. And hence the warning is given at this point, and not at the beginning of the period.

When the mark of the beast is rolled out, it will have serious consequences for those who refuse to take it, and the threat of these consequences could be so great, that some will give up on their faith. Let's think about those consequences, so that we can consider our decision ahead of time.

Jesus said this in Luke chapter 14 verse 28. Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Won't you first sit down and estimate the cost to see if you have enough money to complete it? In a similar way, we must think carefully how we will finish our race, and what it will take to endure.

Revelation chapter 13 verse 17 is clear that once the mark is rolled out, people will not be able to buy or sell without the mark on their hand or head. Let's unpack that for a while. The ability of the antichrist system to prevent people buying or selling will most likely be only possible in a cashless society.

Digital currency allows central control of bank accounts. In this scenario, it should be simple for the antichrist system to freeze the accounts of those who refuse the mark.

## **Consequences of refusing the Mark of the Beast.**

Let's imagine how that could play out in your life. Those who refuse the mark could be reduced to eating vegetation that grows in the wild, or allotment produce, or long life food, if you have any stored. Your children would never again taste their favourite food. When your food supplies run dry, you and your family would be forced to fast.

You would not be able to pay any bills, run a car, feed a pet, use any service that expects payment, shop online or in store. If your boiler breaks down, it stays broken. If your pipes burst, the leak cannot be fixed. If your fridge stops working, you cannot replace it.

You will not be able to travel anywhere, your mobile phone and broadband contracts would be ended. You may be summoned to court for non payment of council tax. If you pay rent, or have a mortgage, you will be made homeless in a short while.

Your monthly salary would bounce, any income such as pensions or second incomes from investments would do the same. Everything you have ever worked for would become meaningless.

Life would lose all purpose except to love God, look forward to Jesus returning, pray, and witness to the world. The only pursuits you will be able to follow will be those which do not cost money.

In summary, those who refuse the mark will be forced to live like John the Baptist. Hunter gatherer instincts will kick in, and money will become a meaningless memory. Yes, believers in the same boat may be able to help each other out, but the impact of living without money cannot be over-exaggerated.

Those who refuse the mark will face intense pressure from family who do not share the same convictions. Some may try living without money, and after a few weeks or months, the stress of losing all your comforts and relationships may become all too much.

Many will buckle under the pressure, and go back on their decision, reasoning that if God loves them, surely He would not expect them to go through such extreme hardship, when all it takes is a simple nod to the antichrist regime, and the money merry-go-round can start spinning again.

Like a drug addict starved of their addiction, many will gladly rush back to their love of money.

At that point, the real meaning of Matthew chapter 6 verse 24 will hit you. You cannot serve both God and money. When believers decide to take the mark, they will know in their hearts that they are renouncing their faith. Even if they do not explicitly deny Jesus, they will know in their hearts that, like Judas, they have chosen financial reward above Jesus.

## **The example of Judas Iscariot.**

They say that “every man has his price”. God wants to find out if this is true for you. The time to consider what you will do when presented with the mark, is now, before we are drowning in turmoil and chaos. It is not a decision to be taken lightly, but you must understand what hardship it will bring, and what it will cost you. Then you must balance this with the consequence of taking the mark, and make a decision either to live for eternity, or for the pleasures of the moment.

Let's look at a real life example of apostasy, found in the character of Judas Iscariot. John chapter 13 verse 21 tells us that Jesus was troubled in his spirit, and said, “Truly, truly, I say to you, one of you will betray me”. We all know that it was Judas, but the disciples did not know. On the outside he appeared to have the same objectives, the same mission and the same relationship with Jesus. On the inside, he evidently had his own agenda.

John chapter 12 tells us that Judas Iscariot was a thief, who pretended to have compassion on the poor, but rather helped himself to the funds held by the disciples. Towards the end of Jesus's ministry, Judas went to the high priests to ask for a price for betraying Jesus. They agreed on thirty pieces of silver. Apostasy is only possible when you value something else greater than Jesus.

Judas betrayed Jesus with a kiss. Many people who reject their faith, may do so in an apparent show of love for their own. They may reason that they are trying to protect their nearest and dearest from persecution. However the plans of the apostate are shallow and short lived, as Judas found out. Jesus said, “if you deny me before men, I will deny you before the father”.

Apostasy is the ultimate scam. There is that moment when satan enters the apostate to convince him to act on his doubt, just as happened to Judas, when Jesus offered him bread at the supper.

What should have been a holy moment for Judas, became the moment that Judas succumbed to the pressure from the devil to betray. Satan's deal was not a good one. Thirty pieces of silver and an eternity in hell. Judas regretted the decision to betray Jesus very shortly afterwards.

May we not follow this example.

## **Pre-empting the Mark of the Beast.**

So how do you prepare for this type of challenge? How do you prepare for living without money? Yes there are some practical things you can do. We will hopefully see the signs of the mark of the beast approaching. Possibly these will include the following.

1. A cashless society,

2. Economic collapse,
3. Your bank being bought out by a bank linked to the antichrist regime,
4. The news that the bank or government want you to receive a mark, which will contain identification details to your bank account, replacing the need for a debit card.

No one can prepare completely for this situation. Everyone who refuses the mark will be forced to make huge sacrifices. The only answer is to walk closely with God, pray, and let His word dwell richly in our hearts. For this challenge will require us to completely change our priorities, and increasingly adopt an eternal perspective.

### **What apostasy is not.**

If the campaign and following of the antichrist is worldwide, and prevalent in every country, it is possible that apostasy will be a worldwide trend. In the light of this, let's examine some of the church issues that have been labelled as the great apostasy, and why the label is not valid.

The protestants of the 16<sup>th</sup> century were labelled apostates and heretics by the catholic church because they departed the Roman Catholic church. But this was not apostasy. If anything, the flames of faith burned brighter in the protestants who broke away, starting with Luther.

Now that the protestant church has a long standing place in church history, some have sought to label the catholic church as the church of apostasy, due to their practices like praying to Mary. However apostasy and wrong practice are two different things. In a similar vein, one church stream will point the finger at another, claiming that their doctrines are evidence that the great apostasy has started.

There are also various prominent Christians who have deconstructed their faith, no longer believe in the reality of hell, or in some way have departed from core Christian theology.

However, no matter how convincing all these arguments are, and no matter how serious the issues, these departures from doctrine have not coincided with the beginning of the antichrist regime. Jesus described the apostasy taking place after a huge rise in extreme persecution and hatred against Christians and Jews. Paul also paired the apostasy with the arrival of the antichrist.

Also, note that none of the above groups accused of being apostates have rejected the Christian faith, but simply diluted it with beliefs that are not based on the bible. When you study the true meaning of the word "apostasy", it conveys a final departure from Christianity.



## **To conclude. Preparing to endure to the end.**

Let's be aware that the extreme persecution of the end times will apply unprecedented pressure to our lives. No one will stand firm by their own strength. It will be by God's help alone that anyone will stand firm to the end. But if we stand firm, it can be a holy moment for us. It can be a time where we are empowered to witness for Jesus.

A time where we know what it is to be one spirit with the Lord. Or it could be a time of fear, and self preservation. A time of strength or a time of weakness.

And as every athlete knows, strength does not come by chance. Muscles do not grow unless you exercise them. Unless we are prepared to face this time of persecution, unless we make prayer our habit, unless we train for this as if our very lives depend on it, we may find that when the time comes, our strength fails.

So this message comes not as a prediction of doom and despair, but a warning to prepare for war. Not that we will war with those who persecute us, but we war with the fear and the doubt that would want us to back down from our faith. The old saying is true. Failure to prepare, is preparation for failure.

It is not explicit, but maybe Paul was referring to the end times period when he said in Ephesians chapter 6, "Therefore take up the whole armour of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand firm".

There is over 100 verses in the bible about deception. We should know that as the end times approaches this topic will become increasingly important. Here are a few verses in the Bible about deception. This is a trap we do not want to fall into.

### **1 Timothy 4 verse 1**

Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons.

### **Ephesians 5 verse 6**

Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God's wrath comes on those who are disobedient.

### **Jeremiah 17 verse 9**

The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?

### **Romans 3 verse 13**

“Their throats are open graves; their tongues practice deceit. ‘The poison of vipers is on their lips.’”

Romans 16 verse 18

For such people are not serving our Lord Christ, but their own appetites. By smooth talk and flattery they deceive the minds of naïve people.

Studying truth helps us recognise deception. Here are some Bible verses proclaiming the truth to help us stay away from deception.

Psalms 43 verse 1

Vindicate me, my God, and plead my cause against an unfaithful nation. Rescue me from those who are deceitful and wicked.

Psalms 120 verse 2

Save me, LORD, from lying lips and from deceitful tongues.

Colossians 2 verse 8

See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the elemental spiritual forces of this world rather than on Christ.

Ephesians 6 verse 14

Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place,

Psalms 25 verse 5

Guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God my Savior, and my hope is in you all day long.

As we draw closer to the end days the Bible warns us about staying close to Jesus and being ready.

Amen?

### **What Do You Think?**

Can ignorance of the end times, as in Noah's day (Matthew 24) be a factor in the great apostasy? And Why?

Discuss if the pre-trib rapture view could result in apostasy if the their view is wrong?

Could people lose their faith if they want to save their life? and how do we keep our faith strong?

Have you thought about the ramifications of refusing the mark and how to trust God for provision?