

Unbelievers — Deceived In The Tribulation

When I was much younger, I did not fully understand the significance of the nation of Israel returning to the land in 1948. I did not know about the prophecies that said they would eventually be gathered together again. But it was the only significant sign that I knew about in my youth that revealed we were closer to the rapture — the next major event in God’s plan for the future. On occasions, Christians talked about the rapture and how exciting it was going to be. I remember the movie titled, “A Thief in the Night.” It was about the rapture. It seemed that every Christian wanted to see it.

But rarely did anyone talk about the antichrist. I do not recall anyone speaking about the millennial kingdom. In fact, it is unusual today to hear someone teach about the rapture, the antichrist, the tribulation, the second coming of Christ and the millennial kingdom. We often hear that we cannot know for sure what is going to happen in the future. Then the joke we hear is that it will “all pan out in the end.” Their point is that there are so many different views, so who can know? Yet, the same thing could be said about other theological doctrines. Why do they not teach about future prophecy? I wonder if they avoid it because there are so many details to study before one can arrive at a conclusion? Whatever the reason, I have enjoyed the opportunity to study and teach about the end time events in this series. As a result,

I have also discovered some new truths about future events! I have gained some important insights into God the Father. I have learned that He wants to comfort Christians by sharing with us His plans for us. It is wonderful to realize that He cares enough about us to share His plans. Because of these studies, it has also been wonderful to gain insight into what is happening in our world and to realize that we are marching even closer to the rapture. As a result, we can understand why certain patterns of sinful behavior are increasing so dramatically.

This study is not any different. It is going to reinforce another important truth. Our study is from 2 Thessalonians 2:10-12. It is not about the rapture, antichrist, the tribulation, the second coming of Christ, or the kingdom. It is about the

unbelievers who will be living in the tribulation. Now we have already learned that the unbelievers in the tribulation will be severely punished by three judgments. The first is the seal judgment. The second and third are the trumpet and bowl judgments as described in



Revelation 6-19. We have already learned that one-third of the earth and the animals will be destroyed by these plagues, as God pours out His wrath on the world. Two-thirds of the people will be killed, and the unbelievers who are still alive at the end of the tribulation will then be sent to hell for eternity. At this point, you might wonder what more is there to learn about the unbelievers? That introduces us to two questions

that our study answers. The first question is, “What happens to unbelievers in the tribulation who reject Jesus Christ?” The second question is, “Why do some unbelievers reject Jesus Christ?”

THE PERISHING ARE UNBELIEVERS. This study teaches us five principles. The first principle introduces us to some unbelievers who will be living in the tribulation. I will begin by reading verses 8 and 9.

Then that lawless one will be revealed whom the Lord will slay with the breath of His mouth and bring to an end by the appearance of His coming; that is, the one whose coming is in accord with the activity of Satan, with all power and signs and false wonders . . . 2 Thessalonians 2:8-9 (NASB)

We have already learned that the man who is called the “lawless one” in verse 8 is the antichrist. We discovered that these two words describe his moral character. He is the “no-law” man. He is the ultimate man of sin. He will be an extraordinary individual who will reject any and every authority, including God’s authority. He is like Satan in every sense. He will ignore governmental laws, international laws, and divine laws. Verses 3-4 of this chapter tell us that he wants to be God. Verse 4 says that he will eventually declare himself to be God. Revelation 13 teaches that he will demand that everyone worship him and blaspheme God. He is the “no-law” man. He will not want any limits on his behavior.

Verse 9 reminds that he will be empowered by Satan. He will be demon possessed. He will perform miracles, signs, and false wonders. Notice the important word “false.” He may appear to be like a religious man who can do miraculous things, and his works will appear to be real. Yet, he will be a fraud. He will be like the old-time quack doctors on the old medicine wagons as featured in the western movies. He will promise everything and claim to do everything. He will be more than a great deceiver. He will be an incredible deceiver. He will be an awesome and extremely dangerous individual.

Now verse 10 is the beginning of our study. It introduces some unbelievers who will be living in the tribulation. The verse says,

. . . and with all the deception of wickedness for those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved. 2 Thessalonians 2:10 (NASB)

Here we are told that those who perish will be deceived, and verses 8-9 tell us the deception will be caused by both the antichrist and Satan. “Those who perish” are unbelievers. “Perish” means they are headed for hell. The last part of these verses explains why. It says they will not be saved. They will not be saved because they have rejected Jesus Christ. In John 3:16 Jesus promised two things to anyone who believes in Christ. He promised first that those who believe in Him will not perish. Then He promised that they will have eternal life. The verse says,

For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life. John 3:16 (NASB)

Here Jesus used the same Greek word for perish that occurs in 2 Thessalonians 2:10. The Greek word for “perish” is *apollymi*. It is a compound word composed of “not” and “to destroy.” That is, Jesus said those who believe in Him will “not be destroyed,” but have eternal life. Jesus’ point was that those who believe in Him will not perish or not go to hell. They will go to heaven and live with Him forever.

This helps us understand the meaning of “perish” in 2 Thessalonians 2:10. Those who are perishing are the unbelievers who have rejected Jesus Christ, and consequently, are not saved. Now you might wonder why I said, “Those who are perishing.” I said that because the Greek tense of the word is a participle which implies that they are in the process of perishing. They are perishing even while they are still living in this life. Therefore, the first principle is that the perishing are unbelievers who have finally and ultimately rejected Christ.

THE PERISHING DO NOT LOVE TRUTH. Now we must not conclude that everyone who is an unbeliever at the beginning of the tribulation is going to perish. Since the rapture of Christians will occur before the tribulation, this means only unbelievers will be living on earth when the tribulation starts. Yet, Daniel 7:21 and numerous passages in Revelation state

that there will be believers in the tribulation. That means some unbelievers will become believers. Notice that verse 10 does not say that all unbelievers will perish. We need to be careful because the Holy Spirit is very careful. The Holy Spirit is saying that those who are perishing are those who “did not receive the love of the truth.” That is, not everyone who enters the tribulation will embrace the truth.

This gives us our second principle, those who are perishing do not really love truth. This principle is an absolute truth. It is true today. It will also be true in the tribulation. Those who are perishing may say they love truth, but they are self-deceived. They are not really interested in truth. They hate spiritual truth. They are not truth seekers unless the Holy Spirit is drawing them to Jesus Christ. If the Holy Spirit is drawing them, they will eventually become Christians (John 6:37).

The Perishing Accept Satan’s Lies. Sadly, “the perishing” only accept the lies of Satan. John 8:44 says Satan is the father of lies. 1 John 5:19 reminds us that the whole world lies in the power of the evil one — Satan. Therefore, “the perishing” love Satan’s lies. They do not accept the fact that Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life (John 14:6). When He walked among us, He said to the Jewish leaders,

But because I speak the truth, you do not believe Me. John 8:45 (NASB)

This means that those who are perishing welcome the lies of Satan. He is their spiritual father. But truth seekers will believe Christ. In Jeremiah 29:13-14, God promised,

You will seek Me and find Me when you search for Me with all your heart. “I will be found by you,” declares the LORD . . . Jeremiah 29:13-14 (NASB)

That is, God will help those who truly seek truth to find Him. This helps us understand that 2 Thessalonians 2:10 tells us that those who are perishing do not love truth.

In past years some churches have minimized the teaching of Scripture with the goal of appealing to people they call “seekers.” Some have even said that every unbeliever is a seeker. But that is not true! If the Holy Spirit is drawing them, the

preacher does not have to soften or minimize the message of Scripture. When the Holy Spirit is drawing them, they will come to Christ (John 6:37). The Holy Spirit will give them understanding. We do not need to make the gospel comfortable and appealing. Pastors and teachers who feel they must make the truth more appealing have ignored the obvious teaching of Scripture. Scripture clearly teaches that “the perishing” think the gospel is foolishness (1 Corinthians 1:18). Only the Holy Spirit can help them understand they have believed lies.

The Perishing Reject Scripture. We have already discovered in 2 Thessalonians 2:3 that a great apostasy will occur in the last days. This refers to a rejection of God by those outside and inside the church. The point is that the rejection of truth will dramatically increase. Instead of loving truth, people will hate spiritual truth even more! 1 Timothy 4:1-2 says that in the last days people will follow the doctrines of demons. The point is that if God has said it, they will reject it.

We are experiencing this now and it is getting worse. For example, in Genesis 1:27-28, God said that He created us to be male and female. Then He commanded us as males and females to be fruitful and multiply. When He said that, God defined male and female. Males and females are those who can procreate or have children. Scripture also says that God created us in the womb (Job 31:15). God determined who we are at the moment of conception. But unbelievers are now saying that we cannot know the gender of a baby at birth. For example, the CNN network reported this,

A CNN report recently made this ridiculous anti-scientific and absurd claim: “It’s not possible to know a person’s gender identity at birth, and there is no consensus criteria for assigning sex at birth.”¹

CNN and others are rejecting truth. We are also being told that babies are not human at conception, but are merely a piece of tissue. Some now claim that men can have babies! We are being told to believe one contradiction after another.

Summary of Scripture. Two times in the book of Psalms we are reminded that the fool says there is no God (Psalm 10:4;

1. Becket Adams. “There’s something very wrong with our press.” MSN. 4/2/2021.

14:1). To say this once would be enough. But the repetition emphasizes the point that such a statement is truly stupid. Yet some people say God does not exist. They reject capital punishment. They reject marriage and sexual purity. Increasingly, many nations are rejecting every God ordained principle given in Scripture. If Scripture says it, they are opposed to it. These examples reveal that even now those who are perishing do not love truth. The message of 2 Thessalonians 2:10 is that “the perishing” do not love truth, and it will become worse in the last days.

THE PERISHING WILL BE GREATLY DECEIVED. The third principle is that the perishing will be greatly deceived, and God will help them to be deceived. Notice the first part of verse 10 says, that “the perishing” in the tribulation will be deceived with “all the deception of wickedness.” This refers to great deception by the antichrist and Satan. This does not refer to a magic show. The antichrist will not be performing “sight-of-hand” to impress people. Instead, he will use various forms of wickedness to deceive the world. Notice the word “all.” He will use every form of evil available to deceive the people of the world. We can only guess what he may do. Verse 4 has already told us that he will lie. The biggest lie he will give is, “I am God.” Daniel 7:8 reveals he will assassinate other world leaders to gain power. Daniel 7:21 and Revelation 13:7 state he will murder the saints and the Jewish people too! As a demon possessed man, he will deceive using wickedness as a tool.

Verse 11 adds that God will help the antichrist deceive the unbelievers of the world who are perishing. The verse says,

For this reason God will send upon them a deluding influence so that they will believe what is false . . . 2 Thessalonians 2:11 (NASB)

The first three words, “For this reason,” connect us back to verse 10. This means the reason God will send “a deluding influence” is that “the perishing” did not love the truth, including the truth about Jesus Christ.

This gives us the third principle that the perishing in the tribulation will be allowed to be greatly deceived into believing what is false. Those who are perishing will believe the antichrist is God. The media will praise him. Every unbeliever who

is perishing will praise him. They will think he is wonderful and justify his every evil deed, but they will not believe he is doing evil. He will be the ultimate Satanically wicked and seemingly all-powerful man on the earth. The deception will be incredible.

But believers will not be deceived. Jesus told the disciples that people will believe in false Christs, but the elect will not be deceived (Matthew 24:24). Christians will understand what is happening during the tribulation. That means true Christians will understand what is happening even now. In fact, it is obvious that the deception is well underway in our time.

THE PERISHING WILL BE JUDGED IN THIS LIFE. The fourth principle is found in the first part of verse 12. It is that God will use the evil deception of Satan and the antichrist to further demonstrate that His judgment on the perishing is justified and righteous. The first part of verse 12 says,

. . . in order that they all may be judged . . . 2 Thessalonians 2:12a (NASB)

Now this principle is not new in Scripture. The principle is given in Isaiah 6:9-10.

He said, “Go, and tell this people:

‘Keep on listening, but do not perceive;

Keep on looking, but do not understand.’

Render the hearts of this people insensitive,

Their ears dull,

And their eyes dim,

Otherwise they might see with their eyes,

Hear with their ears,

Understand with their hearts,

And return and be healed.”

Isaiah 6:9-10 (NASB)

In this passage God told the prophet Isaiah to tell the people to not perceive, and to not understand. He was to urge them to keep doing this until their hearts were completely hardened. Isaiah was to do this because the people had already ultimately and finally rejected God. This is God’s judicial punishment

for their hardened unbelief. Romans 1:21-28 tells us that God abandons those who ultimately and finally reject Him. Verse 21 says because they became wise in their own eyes, He gave them over to their sin. God announces it three times. Isaiah 6:9-10 is the consequence of their final and ultimate rejection of God.

This principle can be seen also in Matthew 13 after Jesus teaches the disciples about the parable of the sower of the seed. The disciples have a question. Here is their question.

And the disciples came and said to Him, “Why do You speak to them in parables?” Jesus answered them, “To you it has been granted to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been granted. For whoever has, to him more shall be given, and he will have an abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has shall be taken away from him. Therefore I speak to them in parables; because while seeing they do not see, and while hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. In their case the prophecy of Isaiah is being fulfilled, which says,

‘YOU WILL KEEP ON HEARING, BUT WILL NOT UNDERSTAND;
YOU WILL KEEP ON SEEING, BUT WILL NOT PERCEIVE;
FOR THE HEART OF THIS PEOPLE HAS BECOME DULL,
WITH THEIR EARS THEY SCARCELY HEAR,
AND THEY HAVE CLOSED THEIR EYES,
OTHERWISE THEY WOULD SEE WITH THEIR EYES,
HEAR WITH THEIR EARS,
AND UNDERSTAND WITH THEIR HEART AND RETURN,
AND I WOULD HEAL THEM.’

Matthew 13:10-15 (NASB)

Why did Jesus speak to them in parables? Because this group already did not believe in Him. They were simply listeners. They were not truth seekers. Therefore, God prevented them from further understanding. The principle is repeated in Acts 28:25-28 after a group of people refused to believe in the gospel. The point is that as an act of judgment in this life, God

secures those individuals in their unbelief. On their own they will continue to demonstrate their guilt as they worship the antichrist and commit horrible sins. On their own they will confirm the righteousness of God’s judgment on them, even before they are sent to hell. As Hebrews 10:31 says,

It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God.
Hebrews 10:31 (NASB)

THE PERISHING PREFER SINFUL PLEASURE. The fifth principle is given to us in the last part of the verse. Here we are told why the “perishing,” the unbelievers, will be confirmed in their unbelief.

... who did not believe the truth, but took pleasure in wickedness. 2 Thessalonians 2:12b (NASB)

Here God says they will love pleasure more than truth. Those who are perishing love sin more than Christ. The same principle is occurring today too! It is common for some unbelievers to reject Jesus Christ because they fear losing their family or friends if they accept Jesus. Some reject Jesus in favor of sexual sins.

Romans 1:18 says that those who are “perishing” reject truth in favor of sin.

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness . . . Romans 1:18 (NASB)

Sadly, some who claim to be Christians refuse to give up their sins because they love their sin more than Jesus. The danger for these individuals is that a lack of desire to love Jesus more than themselves may be a sign they are not actually Christians.

Then verses 21-22 say,

... because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish

heart was darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools . . .
Romans 1:21-22 (NASB)

If we keep reading Romans 1, we are told God gives men and women over to their own sexual passions and desires. Verses 29-31 reveal what they love. It is a long list of sins. Consequently, they reject God because they love sin.

CONCLUSION. Now let me repeat the five principles and put them in a different order. The first principle is that those who are perishing are unbelievers who have finally and ultimately rejected Christ. The second principle is that the perishing do not love the truth. The fifth principle is the perishing do not love truth is that they love their sin more! That is a major problem in evangelism. When we share the gospel, those who love sin more than truth will reject the gospel. That is God's testimony from this passage.

The third principle is that as a result the perishing will be greatly deceived in the tribulation and in this life. Satan is lying to them, and God is increasingly allowing it to happen to confirm the perishing in their rejection of Jesus—to confirm them in their unbelief. The fourth principle is that as a result God will judge them and the judgment will be exceedingly severe in the tribulation.

For us as believers, this helps us understand that the perishing will not only be punished by trials of circumstances, trials due to physical sickness, and the consequences of sin, but also by God's judicial act of blinding them from knowing the truth. Imagine being blinded from knowing truth. That is why Jesus told the disciples . . .

For a little while longer the Light is among you. Walk while you have the Light, so that darkness will not overtake you; he who walks in the darkness does not know where he goes. John 12:35
(NASB)

Jesus was talking about more than truth about himself. Jesus was talking about truth - period. The blind do not see! So, when we share Christ, do not be surprised that some unbelievers cannot see. They may be the perishing or those who are already confirmed in their unbelief. The tribulation will be filled with many of these individuals.

So, what should we do? Share Christ now before the rapture comes and rescue as many as we can. To become a Christian in the tribulation will be much more difficult.