

**2 Thessalonians 1:5-8****PREFACE**

We find ourselves once again in the midst of another of the apostle Paul's interminable sentences—some translations, such as *Young's Literal*, begin the sentence at v3 and do not end it until the end of the chapter, v12. So, once again, if we are to study this passage in earnest we are forced to begin and end each of our sessions before reaching the closing period.

Last week we applied v5 to the present-day situation of the Thessalonians. They had been demonstrating “perseverance and faith in the midst of all [their] persecutions and afflictions”; this, Paul says, was “a plain indication of God's righteous judgment,” which reckoned them worthy of God's kingdom. Now, in this session, we will use vv5-6 as a launchpad into a *future* sense of God's “righteous judgment.”

**Read 2 Thessalonians 1:4-6.****wv6-7A**

Verse 6 opens the door to the *parousia*—the final coming of Christ, and His subsequent judicial role—but we need not restrict its interpretation to that time frame. Indeed, for many who oppress and persecute Christians their judgment will not occur until the *final* judgment, when Christ Himself will winnow the chaff from the wheat, the goats from the sheep. But that does not mean that some do not receive their “comeuppance” in the here and now.

The beginning of v7 continues this thought:

[6] For after all it is only just for God to repay with affliction those who afflict you,  
[7a] and to give relief to you who are afflicted and to us as well

The rest of v7 makes clear that Paul is speaking of God's *future* retribution against those in opposition to believers and the faith.

...when the Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire,

That is the intended context, of course, but I don't think we do violence to the passage if we remind ourselves that sometimes God's judgment does not tarry, but is meted out fairly quickly. It does not mean that the Lord ignores our affliction—indeed, it may have come from Him in the first place—or those who inflict it, putting off any response until The Day. He may immediately repay in full, or He may bring partial relief.

For example, when the Egyptians were in pursuit of Israel, the Lord could have stopped them on the west bank of the sea with His pillar of cloud until Israel was safely on the east bank, and held them there until the water returned to its place. That would have brought relief to Israel. Instead, He invited the Egyptians to pursue, then drowned them in the returning water.

The important lesson is not *when* He chooses to respond, but the promise that He will.

## v7B

With the second half of v7—and some interpreters say even v6—we are now firmly in the context of The Day, the *parousia*, the day of Final Judgment after Christ's return. Let's get our bearings: In his first letter to the Thessalonians Paul spoke of Christ's *first* return—not to earth, but to “the clouds” above it.

### Read 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17.

This first account describes the “rapture” of the church, when Jesus returns to lift all believers—dead and alive (in that order)—from the earth before the commencement of the Tribulation, which will last seven years. The Tribulation will end with the *second* return of Christ, which is addressed here in our passage in the second letter.

Judgment and retribution will not be a part of His first return, but *will* be of His second.

### Read 2 Thessalonians 1:6-8.

**Sidebar:** Some interpreters say that the relief mentioned in vv6-7a speaks of the relief Christ will bring to those who have been persecuted during the Tribulation. They may indeed be included in this, but Paul speaks to the Thessalonians, in v6, of “those who afflict *you*,” and in the beginning of v7, “to give relief to *you*.” This final and absolute repayment of affliction upon those who afflict believers will indeed take place at (and after) Christ's return, but Paul does not limit the afflicted only to those alive during the Tribulation.

Christ's first return will be momentary (“in the twinkling of an eye”) and specifically focused on the righteous dead and living; those left behind will know only that some who had been next to them had, mysteriously and suddenly, vanished. Christ Jesus will not be seen by anyone not joining Him “in the air,” “in the clouds.”

For the redeemed there will be a sweetness about Christ's first return—certainly a time of rejoicing and wonder as every follower of Christ, dead and alive, receives a new body fit for heaven. But while there will certainly be majesty and glory and wonder attendant to Christ's *second* return, there will be no sweetness, no rejoicing. The prophet Zechariah offers us a frightening account of “The Day of the Lord.”

### Read Zechariah 14:1-15.

[Back to our text.](#)

Note how in contrast to His first return, when Christ will “descend from heaven,” but remain “in the clouds,” “in the air,” now at His second return he is “revealed from heaven,” but (as we know from Zechariah 14:4) now “His feet will stand” upon the earth. And two other things are “revealed.” ([literally, “at the revelation of the Lord Jesus”](#))

**revealed** = *apokalypsei* (verb form of *apokalypsis*) = from <G601> (apokalupto);  
**disclosure** :- appearing, coming, lighten, manifestation, be revealed, revelation; to “take off the cover.”

**Sidebar:** Now is a good time to reiterate something mentioned earlier in this study. The respected scholar, Wayne Grudem, writes, “The interpretation of the details of prophetic passages regarding future events is often a complex and difficult task involving many variable factors.” I would punctuate that with a hearty “Amen!”

There are many different interpretations of Biblical text regarding the end times; some have been given very long, fifty-cent labels, and the interpretation subscribed to by our church (and this teacher) has the longest label of all: *Pretribulational Premillennialism*. (see [handout](#))

We should all keep in mind that many faithful, Bible-believing followers of Christ disagree on the sequence of events of the end times; for example, Grudem himself subscribes to the historic *Premillennialism* position, and his arguments for it are well-reasoned and convincing.

So while any of us can rightfully say, “This is what I believe God’s word says about the end times,” we should avoid any dogmatic, insistent arguments about our position, and remain gracious toward those holding a position with which we disagree.

Keep in mind, too, that any eschatological position is based not on one, definitive proof-text, but on a close examination of many, and how they are woven together. Our current passage is a case in point; it would be very difficult to establish the *Pretribulational Premillennialism* position on this text alone—which is why I have spent a lot of time last week feeling like I was chasing my own tail. In fact, this passage and especially Chapter Two were in Pastor Jeremy’s mind when he replied to my pitch for teaching these two letters with (in so many words), “Are you sure you’re up to it?”

### *His mighty angels*

This does not refer to *all* the angels. King David had his “Mighty Men,” a subset of his army consisting of thirty of his most powerful, reliable warriors. Similarly, Christ Jesus has His “Mighty Angels,” or, *literally*, “[the angels of His power](#)” That is, these are the angels who are the ministers by whom He makes His might to be recognized. It is not *their* might, but *His* might. David’s men were noteworthy for their own power and prowess; Christ’s mighty angels are noteworthy for their effectiveness in channeling *the Lord’s* power.

### *in flaming fire*

This is not the fire of hell, or a fire of cleansing. I think the best explanation of this is that it is a way to describe Christ’s inherent *glory*, a manifest sign of His majesty and power. But it also may have a dual purpose: that glory, described by mortal man as “blazing fire,” may upon His arrival—this is a day of judgment, after all—point to the horrible end awaiting some who witness His arrival.

**Sidebar:** The NASB and NIV include this at the end of v7, while the KJVs and ESV place it at the beginning of v8.

We see this in a scene painted by the prophet Isaiah which, while also having more contemporary application for Jerusalem, echoes the passage in Zechariah regarding the return Christ in all His glory to judge the peoples.

**Read Isaiah 30:26-28.**

My guess is that on the day we finally stand before the actual supernatural “glory of God,” we, too, will be so awed that we will struggle to describe it with words. And although this is not textually the flames of hell, on the day they will be *effectually*.

**Read Hebrews 10:26-27.**

**Read Hebrews 12:28-29.**

Those not in Christ, on the day He appears, will see the “flaming” glory of the One who will consign them permanently to the very flames of eternal death. The glory of God in Christ, no matter how it is described, is the manifestation of His purity, holiness and righteousness, and sinners cannot stand against that—which is what v8 speaks to.

v8

In the NASB the sentence begins in v6, so let’s back up to that.

**Read 2 Thessalonians 1:6-8**

**retribution**<sup>NASB</sup>, **vengeance**<sup>CSVS, ESV</sup>, **punish**<sup>NIV</sup> = *ekdikēsin* = from <G1556> (ekdikeo); vindication, retribution :- (a-, re-) venge (-ance), punishment.

“The word stem for *ekdikēsin* (this word) is the same as that for “righteous” in v5, and “just” in v6” (Thomas). So Christ’s act here is not one of selfish vindictiveness or revenge, but emanates from a righteous judge meting out appropriate justice for a “criminal offense.” When a human judge assigns punishment to a criminal in a court of law, we do not say that the judge is taking personal vengeance, but that he is just rendering a righteous and deserved verdict with punishment. That is the setting here, “the idea of a firm administration of unwavering justice” (Morris).

This “penalty” (v9) is meted out to two different groups; some commentators assign the first description to Gentiles, or heathen, and the second to Jews. But there is no good reason to so restrict the application: Scripture records both descriptions being applied to both groups, Jews and Gentiles. So let’s just consider the text as it is.

*those who do not know God*

These are individuals who are more than just ignorant, but who have willfully removed themselves from knowing Him—a “criminal blindness” (Lange). They have purposely steered clear of any opportunity to learn of God. They are ignorant of God because they *want* to be.

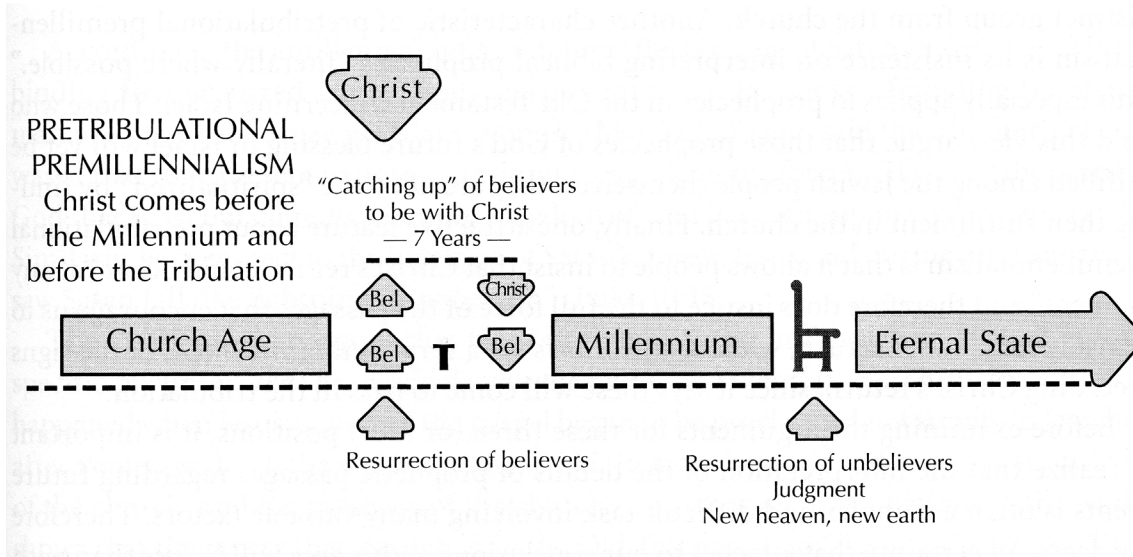
*those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus*

This would refer to anyone who *is* familiar with the teachings of God, but rejects Christ. But then Lange deduces that not only should we not apply this to Gentiles and Jews, but really it is not even two different groups.

*Lange:* ...we shall do better to find already in the eighth verse a description, not of two classes of men, but merely of the two poles of enmity against God: the fundamental aversion of men generally, and the consummation of their contumacy [[haughty, stubborn refusal to submit to authority](#)], when the opportunity of faith has been afforded them.

We will pick this up again in our next session, when we look at vv9-10.

# PRETRIBUTATIONAL PREMILLENNIALISM



(from *Systematic Theology*, by Wayne Grudem)

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