



When He No Longer Restrains

*Now we request you, brethren, with regard to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, that you not be quickly shaken from your composure or be disturbed either by a spirit or a message or a letter as if from us, to the effect that **the day of the Lord** has come. Let no one in any way deceive you, for it **will not come unless the apostasy comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed**, the son of destruction, who opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as being God. Do you not remember that while I was still with you, I was telling you these things? **And you know what restrains him now**, so that in his time he will be revealed. For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only he who now restrains will do so until he is taken out of the way. 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, 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. For this reason God will send upon them a deluding influence so that they will believe what is false, in order that they all may be judged who did not believe the truth, but took pleasure in wickedness. (2 Thessalonians 2:1-12)*

“The day of the Lord” is not describing a single, literal twenty-four hour day, but that closing period of history when the wrath of God’s judgment is finally poured out. There are many scriptural references to it, most notably Peter’s quote of Joel in his explanation for what is taking place on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2. As I expounded in much more detail in the article for Moriel Ministries, “[Does the Church Age End with the Day of the Lord?](#)”, we see the same signs in Revelation 6:12-17 associated with the day of the Lord as provided in parallel scriptural references with the advent of the sixth seal, immediately followed by the sealing of the 144,000 (Rev. 7:4-8) and the removal of the Church (Rev. 7:9-17)—the “*Harpazo*”, in the space between the sixth and seventh seals. What Peter was explaining is how the Church Age, which began with the events witnessed on that Pentecost, will end with the onset of the events associated with the

“Who Can Understand God’s Prophetic Plan”, Page 1 of 9

day of the Lord which commences with the last seal unveiling the trumpet and bowl judgments of God's wrath. And what Paul provides is a sequence of events leading up to it.

The Holy Spirit through Paul provides insight into the significant events which will take place *prior* to the removal of the Church as the final events take place within that final span identified as the seventieth week of Daniel. God's judgments as provided through the seals, which are experienced by everyone, escalate to become the expression of His wrath through the trumpets and bowls, from which the faithful Church will be exempt. (Eph. 5:6; 1 Th. 1:10, 5:9)

One of the things gnawing at me is the number of Christians today who, when it comes to the prophetic End Times events divulged in Scripture, only seem to have knowledge of such things from works of Christian fiction. I wonder if the authors of those works are equally concerned that what they may have intended as a way to reach the unsaved has alternatively, in many cases, come into common use as a substitute for knowing God's Word for many believers. But either way, if you are like myself and others who not only accept this passage literally, but its straightforward sequence of events, there are a couple of significant points which I would argue conflict with the common notion of both what life on earth will be like just prior to when the *Harpazo*—the Greek term for the Rapture, takes place, as well as what it will truly be like for those "left behind". Do we truly appreciate how terrible things will be when the Holy Spirit ("*he who now restrains*") ceases to restrain sin in that period before the *Harpazo*, and even more so for those left behind without Him after it takes place?

Several years ago, a very popular video circulated among Christians which purported to show what it will be like when the *Harpazo* takes place. (It is still available for viewing at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ck6aji4bdWU>.) After a montage of various well-known news clips which could parallel events we know are likely to come in the Last Days, the video shows what looks like a Sunday morning service of several hundred people listening to the pastor preach on the Olivet Discourse. With a dramatic thunderclap, all but a handful instantly disappear and the few who are left behind in the now empty church fall to their knees in repentance, realizing what has just taken place. I am not critical of the video's author's intent, which is clearly aimed at non-believers by the fact that they directly link to a web page 100% focused on getting an unsaved person to accept Christ as their personal Savior. Nonetheless, although I know that this

"Who Can Understand God's Prophetic Plan", Page 2 of 9

was not designed as a doctrinal teaching to be shown to seminary students, there are a couple of items in this presentation which I have found a disturbingly large number of Christians to have adopted as if they are, indeed, fact.

Perhaps the first and not so obvious one is that the *Harpazo* takes place during a normal church service which might be typical for this present hour, but not in the time immediately leading up to the *Harpazo*. What I am referring to is that societal conditions will have changed so much in the period leading up to the *Harpazo* (and the day of the Lord), that we can be quite sure there will be very few, if any, sanctioned public gatherings like this. Persecution is coming unlike anything ever seen before. But in Western cultures, we have become conditioned by the freedoms we have enjoyed for so long that we may be failing to notice what is happening to Christians in the rest of the world, much less for most of human history, which is actually far more normative than what we have experienced, and closer to what we *will* experience.

We are living in the shadow of the imminent arrival of a future when there will be no tax exemption for tithing, when church facilities and organizations will themselves be taxed out of existence, when biblical beliefs will be officially legislated as “hate speech”, and all these things and more lead to open persecution of those who maintain their faith and witness in Christ. As the worst persecution in the history of the world accelerates, true believers of an underground Church will not be meeting together in large, organized numbers in the same way they enjoy today.

If I were to make this video, I would show two groups side-by-side when the *Harpazo* takes place: a small group of faithful believers meeting secretly in a home who have gone underground because of escalating persecution, and a large group of the apostatized—those who have fallen away—still meeting together. When the thunderclap sound effect is executed, everyone in the small group would be taken with none left behind, while no member of the apostasy class would experience anything. (I am not saying the *Harpazo* will take place in secret, I am just trying to emphasize the scriptural reality of the situation.) The apostasy and persecution will have deeply divided true and false believers not just spiritually, but physically, quite a long time before the *Harpazo* takes place.

“At that time many will fall away and will betray one another and hate one another.” (Matthew 24:10)

“Who Can Understand God’s Prophetic Plan”, Page 3 of 9

“Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child; and children will rise up against parents and have them put to death. You will be hated by all because of My name, but the one who endures to the end, he will be saved.” (Mark 13:12-13)

Notice that I am not talking about the whole world here, because we have no reasonable expectation of a right spiritual response from the unsaved; I am making a distinction between what will happen in the world *generally* and in the Church *specifically*. How well do you appreciate what it will truly be like in the days leading up to the *Harpazo* for those clinging to their faith in Christ? When the “violent snatching away” takes place (the literal definition of the term “*harpazo*”), there will **already** have been violent division separating those within the Church. Or, as Paul states it, “*the apostasy comes first*”. (2 Th. 2:3)

Repeated studies over the past decade have consistently shown that the most prolific movement among Bible-believing, born-again Evangelicals in this country is their exodus from the denominations and churches they grew up in and migration to home fellowships and non-affiliated para-churches. (The U.S. estimate is that 20 million have already done so, with the number still growing.) The remnant is already recognizing that apostasy is taking place to such a degree that they have to effect a *spiritual* separation by completing a *physical* separation. Unfortunately, what we are experiencing today is still taking place in a time of relative peace and stability; it is but a fraction of the full effect yet to come, much sooner than for which most appear to be prepared.

Even as bad as things seem to be right now, even though mankind has committed the most unbelievable atrocities in the past two millennia since Christ’s first coming, the working of the Holy Spirit as a restrainer on sin and Satan is seldom taken into consideration as part of what is to come. (2 Th. 2:6-7)

“For then there will be a great tribulation, such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever will. Unless those days had been cut short, no life would have been saved; but for the sake of the elect those days will be cut short. (Matthew 24:21-22)

Things are bad now, but *nothing* like what we are about to experience. It is going to go to a whole new level never seen before in the final stage leading up to the *Harpazo*. The Holy Spirit will cease His role restraining sin and Satan, and they will be loosed in a way we can barely imagine. Particularly for those not just within the Church (the saved) but

Christendom (the apostatized), it will be as far removed from “business as usual” as the East is from the West. The truly saved and the apostatized will not be co-mingling then the way they are now.

But my second issue pertaining to the video representation, as well as what is often presented in Christian fictionalized accounts, is the effect on those who are left behind. A popular belief prevails that the *Harpazo* will be the supernatural sign that will finally convince those left behind to repent and accept Jesus as their Savior. Scripturally this has never been the response to any of God’s previous miraculous signs, so why will this one finally break precedent?

There are many examples, but the most obvious is when Israel was being freed from Egypt. During the plagues there is repeated acknowledgement of the God of Israel as the source, but never any change of heart. People witnessing sign after sign remained spiritually unchanged. The ultimate example came when, through Moses, God parted the sea and Israel crossed over.

*At the morning watch, the LORD looked down on the army of the Egyptians through the pillar of fire and cloud and brought the army of the Egyptians into confusion. He caused their chariot wheels to swerve, and He made them drive with difficulty; so the Egyptians said, “Let us flee from Israel, for **the LORD is fighting for them** against the Egyptians.” Then the LORD said to Moses, “Stretch out your hand over the sea so that the waters may come back over the Egyptians, over their chariots and their horsemen.” (Exodus 14:24-26)*

The Egyptians **know** the truth! They are eye witnesses to all the signs **confirming** the truth! And yet they remained **unchanged** and charge headlong regardless!

What realistic expectation can there be that people not only embracing apostasy but living in denial of Christ in order to avoid persecution, after a lifestyle of repeated rejection of God’s Word and ways, are going to suddenly “get it”? Even more so, this will all take place at a time when the Holy Spirit has withdrawn all restraint on sin and spiritual darkness now taking place, and when Satan will operate at a level many times multiplied! In other words, if such people consistently live in opposition to Christ while Satan’s works are presently restrained by the Holy Spirit, can there be any reasonable expectation they will change their ways when Satan is operating completely *unrestrained* and authoring a time of tribulation “*such has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now*”?

“Who Can Understand God’s Prophetic Plan”, Page 5 of 9

This is another element of 2 Thessalonians 2 which is so often overlooked when it comes to understanding what the hours preceding the *Harpazo* will actually be like, much less in the wake after it takes place.

*For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only he who now restrains will do so until he is taken out of the way. **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, 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**. For this reason God will send upon them a deluding influence so that **they will believe what is false**, in order that they all may be judged who did not believe the truth, but took pleasure in wickedness. (2 Thessalonians 2:7-12)*

The sequence begins with the apostasy, followed by the work of the Holy Spirit as restrainer being removed, and then the revelation and rise of the Antichrist—all **before** the *Harpazo*. There is a time for everyone on this planet, both believer and unbeliever alike, when the Holy Spirit is “*taken out of the way*” and all experience “*the activity of Satan*” at the hand of the Antichrist. Notice that chief among these is “*the deception of wickedness for those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved*”.

What is actually going to take place for those who are left behind? The very same thing which they were embracing just prior to the *Harpazo* taking place: “**they will believe what is false, in order that they all may be judged who did not believe the truth, but took pleasure in wickedness**”. Just like every other biblical example of those unchanged by their witness of a sign from God in both Testaments, they will be incapable of properly processing the truth of what takes place because they never chose to accept the Truth to begin with. The apostasy and persecution will harden unrepentant hearts just like the Egyptians at the time of the Exodus, or the people at the time of the Flood, or the unbelieving Jews in the course of Christ’s first coming. The End Times apostate will be given over to their unbelief which will harden them further even in the face of such a powerful sign, just like everyone else in history before them.

Some time ago I read about an “End Times Email Service”. As I understand it, you pay a small fee to leave a message which will be simultaneously transmitted to everyone on your list when the *Harpazo* occurs. Apparently three Christian couples, all living in

“Who Can Understand God’s Prophetic Plan”, Page 6 of 9

different geographical locations, physically check into the system every day, the theory being that on the day none of them check in, the *Harpazo* has taken place. I am sympathetic with the intention, but I cannot think of a politically correct way to state that this is nothing short of a false hope for our unsaved friends and loved ones. What I am attempting to describe is the reality which Christ Himself taught...

"We must work the works of Him who sent Me as long as it is day; night is coming when no one can work." (John 9:4)

Now some will offer that I have, at the least, slightly skewed the sequence because they have been taught that when the Holy Spirit ceases to restrain, this means that the *Harpazo* simultaneously takes place and the Church is immediately removed. Again, if we have the courage to take Scripture literally, Paul is clearly not articulating the sequence this way. First the apostasy, then the Holy Spirit ceases to restrain so that the Antichrist is plainly revealed, and finally comes the day of the Lord.

This is difficult for many because the question arises as to how there can be members of the Church existing in a situation where the Holy Spirit does not operate as He does at present. Throughout his teachings of more than twenty years, Jacob Prasch of [Moriel Ministries](#) has consistently provided an explanation of how this whole thing works where the Holy Spirit is concerned, and the term he uses is "a reversal of Pentecost".

First of all, we have to acknowledge that the Holy Spirit worked differently in the Old Testament than the New. In the Old Testament, He worked only with certain individuals at certain times, whereas every New Testament believer enjoys His indwelling. But there are many Christians who mistakenly think that the Holy Spirit was only given to Jesus' followers at Pentecost, which is not true at all.

And when He had said this, He breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit." (John 20:22)

In the days following His Resurrection and prior to His Ascension, Jesus imparted the Holy Spirit to His disciples. There was a period of time when the Holy Spirit was still given and working on an individual basis in New Testament times before He was outpoured on the Church as a whole at Pentecost. What we are most likely looking at in Paul's explanation to the Thessalonians of the sequence of End Times events, is a time when the Holy Spirit withdraws and no longer works on a global basis, but returns to operating individually. Believers are still individually sealed, guided and protected, but the global influence restraining the full extent of Satan's and sin's potential are

["Who Can Understand God's Prophetic Plan", Page 7 of 9](#)

withdrawn. This would not conflict with Paul's sequence of events leading up to the day of the Lord.

I believe this also helps us understand why, prior to Pentecost, the Gospels record so much public demonic activity which critics of the Bible rightly point out has not existed since. How is it that not only were so many people possessed or influenced by demons, but that it was commonly diagnosed and understood by so many to be the case? Why haven't we seen the same thing since? Because the Holy Spirit was given Who restrains Satan. Satan's exploits have not been eradicated, and there are certainly notable cases of his working, but this is an even more potent testimony to both the working of the Holy Spirit in the Church Age, and the level of evil which will explode to unimaginable proportions when the Holy Spirit no longer restrains. This is one of the reasons End Times prophecy is rife with examples of demonic activity at Christ's second coming akin to His first, unlike anything the world has seen in between. Prior to Pentecost the Holy Spirit did not restrain Satan in the manner the Holy Spirit is now doing, and things will not only return that way, but be many times worse.

Woe to the earth and the sea, because the devil has come down to you, having great wrath, knowing that he has only a short time. (Revelation 12:12b)

The more important point, however, is placing this into the proper perspective of what it is going to be like for the true and faithful Church in those final days before the *Harpazo* takes place leading to the onslaught of the day of the Lord. Historically, the situation has rarely worked in favor of Christians who have experienced persecution and difficulty to the nth degree. How many more times multiplied will it be not just leading up to that "reversal of Pentecost" when the Holy Spirit no longer restrains, but immediately after! Jesus tells us that it will be of such intensity, that for our sake those days will be cut short. (Mt. 24:22) And in the wake of this, we seriously think that those left behind will finally get it and repent? Perhaps it won't be a response of zero, but I believe Scripture indicates it will be something very close to that.

Obviously I am making the point that we must place our full effort and energy into rescuing the unsaved now when there is the highest hope for success. But there is a whole other group which we should be concerned with who are already *within* the walls of the Church, who are facing the coming test of deception and persecution. They are in need of a kind of "proactive" rescue in the here and now.

"Who Can Understand God's Prophetic Plan", Page 8 of 9

How well do we recognize the urgency of proper, biblical discipleship of those who, without it, are going to not just “fall away” (as so many currently are, even at this very moment), but will turn on us and become our enemies? How well will the undisciplined endure persecution when they stray so easily in present times of relative peace and prosperity? If they cannot discern the obvious deceptions pervading the Church today, what hope is there of discerning them when the multiplied, unrestrained mother of all deception arrives, integrated with unprecedented persecution? For those who cannot walk exclusively according to Christ’s Word and ways while it is still light, how will they turn it all around when it goes from merely getting darker to going totally and unrelentlessly black?

It seems to me that the biggest disservice we can render to others is assuming that the “big sign” of the *Harpazo* will finally turn things around for them.

But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting anxiously for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to eternal life. And have mercy on some, who are doubting; save others, snatching them out of the fire; and on some have mercy with fear, hating even the garment polluted by the flesh. (Jude 20-23)

In Him,

Servant@WalkWithTheWord.org