

The Judgment of the Nations

This is our third study in 2 Thessalonians 2:1-2. We have been describing God's plan for the future. We have visited the book of Daniel since it is the key that unlocks the door to our understanding of God's plan for the future. The prophecy of Daniel is required to understand many of the other prophecies in the Bible, including Jesus' statements in Matthew 24-25, 2 Thessalonians 1-2, and the book of Revelation.

We learned that the prophecy in Daniel 2 described the empires that would occupy and control the land of Israel. The first empire that would occupy the land of Israel was the Babylonian empire, then the Medo-Persian empire, followed by the empires of Greece, and Rome. Then we discovered in Daniel 9:24-27 that there were three important prophecies. The first one is found in Daniel 9:26. It prophesied the Messiah

would die after the sixty-ninth week, which corresponded to the time after March 24, A.D. 33. We learned that Jesus did die as prophesied. The second prophecy said the city of Jerusalem would be destroyed in A.D. 70. This prophecy was accurately fulfilled.

Israel was not in the land for almost two thousand years. Then in 1948, Israel returned to the land. However, today Israel still does not have complete control over all the territory because the Arabs are occupying important parts of the land, especially the temple mount. This means the gap in time has not ended yet.

The third prophecy is given in the next verse, Daniel 9:27. It has not been fulfilled yet. The prophecy is about the seventieth

week of Daniel. We call this period of time the tribulation. Since the Hebrew word for "week" in this passage literally refers to seven years, this means the tribulation will last for seven years. It is important to notice that since the first two prophecies have been literally fulfilled, we know and believe this third prophecy will be fulfilled too! It just has not yet happened. Therefore, we are waiting for the tribulation. We are living in a gap in time. The gap started after the Messiah, Jesus Christ, died and Jerusalem was destroyed in A.D. 70. The gap will end when the tribulation starts.

Daniel 9:27 teaches us that the gap will end when the peace treaty is signed with Israel. Then the tribulation will start. We have also learned that the rapture will occur before the peace treaty and the tribulation starts. You may wonder why

the rapture is not described in Daniel. The answer is that years after Daniel wrote, Paul called it a mystery in 1 Corinthians 15:51. Therefore, once the rapture occurs, a peace treaty will be signed, the tribulation and the day of the Lord

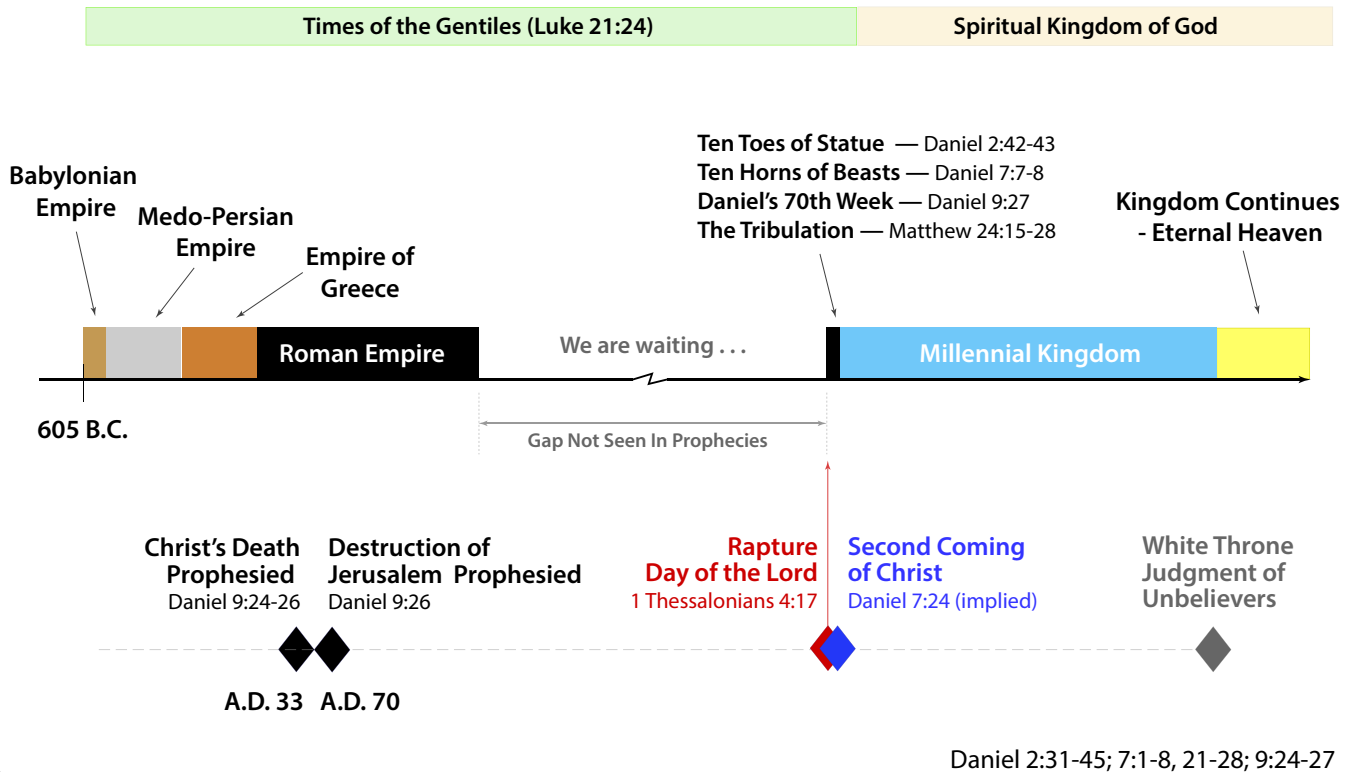


begins. Also, the gap in time ends as the final punishment of Israel begins.

With this understanding, we were able to unlock the meaning of 2 Thessalonians 2:1-2 which says,

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

Five Kingdoms Prophesied In Daniel



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. 2 Thessalonians 2:1-2 (NASB)

We have already learned that “the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him” refers to the rapture. Notice that the term says the Lord Jesus Christ comes. Then we are told believers are “gathered together to Him.” That is, Christ comes in the air—not all the way down to the earth—and we are caught up to Him. That is a great description of the rapture. We studied the rapture in detail in our last study, which was in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18. We also learned that the second term “day of the Lord” starts when the tribulation starts and ends when the universe is destroyed.

THE TRIBULATION. Now I want to talk some more about the tribulation and the second coming of Christ, so that we can discover a few more important details about the millennial kingdom and future judgment.

As we have already stated, Daniel 9:27 prophesied that a seven year period, known as the Tribulation, would occur after the destruction of the city of Jerusalem, and we are now waiting for the rapture and then the tribulation. Let’s look closely at Daniel 9:27. It says,

And he will make a firm covenant with the many for one week, but in the middle of the week he will put a stop to sacrifice and grain offering; and on the wing of abominations will come one who makes desolate, even until a complete destruction, one that is decreed, is poured out on the one who makes desolate. Daniel 9:27 (NASB)

We have already learned that when the verse says, “he will make a covenant,” the “he” is the antichrist. We will be learning more about him in 2 Thessalonians 2. The verse says that the antichrist will make a peace treaty with Israel for one week.

That is the tribulation. We are also told that in the middle of the tribulation, the covenant will be broken, and the abomination of desolation will occur. Then we are told destruction will follow and the abomination of desolation will occur. I am skipping all of the details about the abomination of desolation and the antichrist for right now. We will discuss them more in 2 Thessalonians.

Next, notice Jesus' comment in Matthew 24:15-21.

Therefore, when you see the ABOMINATION OF DESOLATION which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand) . . . Matthew 24:15 (NASB)

Here Jesus refers to the abomination of desolation mentioned in Daniel 9:27. This means He is talking about the middle of the tribulation. If we keep reading, we discover that Jesus is teaching about the last half of the seventieth week. Notice that

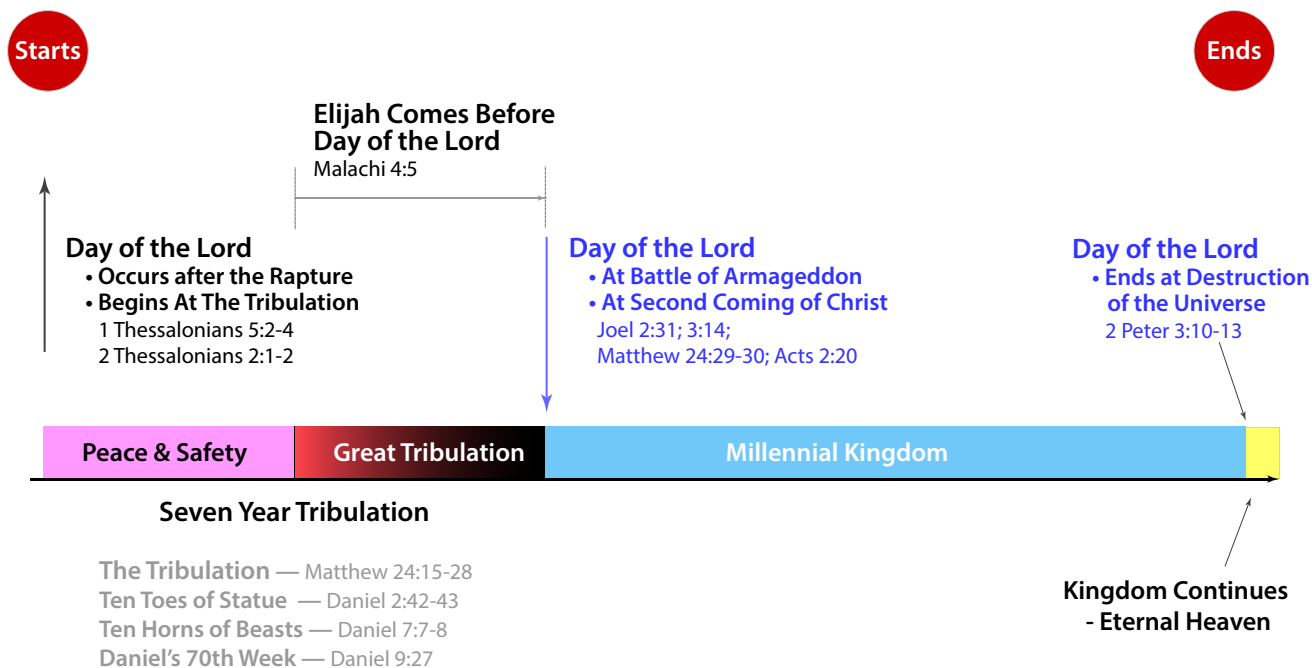
Jesus calls the last half of Daniel's seventieth week the "great tribulation" in verse 21. He said,

For then there will be a great tribulation, such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever will. Matthew 24:21 (NASB)

If we keep reading, we discover that Jesus continues describing the great tribulation. Here are verses 22-28.

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. Then if anyone says to you, 'Behold, here is the Christ,' or 'There He is,' do not believe him. For false Christs and false prophets will arise and will show great signs and wonders, so as to mislead, if possible, even the elect. Behold, I have told you in advance. So if they say to you, 'Behold, He is in the wilderness,' do not go out, or, 'Behold, He is in the inner rooms,' do not believe them. For

The Day of the Lord



just as the lightning comes from the east and flashes even to the west, so will the coming of the Son of Man be. Matthew 24:15-27 (NASB)

This means Jesus Himself used the term tribulation. It is not original with us.

THE SECOND COMING OF CHRIST. Then in the next three verses, He described His second coming.

But 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 the sky, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. And then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the **SON OF MAN COMING ON THE CLOUDS OF THE SKY** with power and great glory. And He will send forth His angels with **A GREAT TRUMPET** and **THEY WILL GATHER TOGETHER** His elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other. Matthew 24:29-31 (NASB)

The second coming of Christ is also described in Daniel 7:9-14; Zechariah 14:1-8 and Revelation 19:11-20:6. But this passage is wonderful because Jesus described what will happen. Jesus said the sun, moon and stars will not give light. The Son of Man will appear. Everyone will see Him, and His angels will come with Him.

Zechariah 14 also describes the second coming of Christ. We need to visit this passage because it reveals that the millennial kingdom follows His coming. Verses 1-5 say,

Behold, a day is coming for the LORD when the spoil taken from you will be divided among you. For I will gather all the nations against Jerusalem to battle, and the city will be captured, the houses plundered, the women ravished and half of the city exiled, but the rest of the people will not be cut off from the city. Then the LORD will go forth and fight against those nations, as when He fights on a day of battle . . . Then the LORD, my God, will come, and all the holy ones with Him! Zechariah 14:1-5

Verse 1 describes the “second coming of the Lord.” Verse 2 says

all the nations are gathered. This refers to the battle of Armageddon when all the nations gather against Jerusalem. Verses 3-5 describe the defeat of the armies of the world. The next verses give us more information.

In that day there will be no light; the luminaries will dwindle. For it will be a unique day which is known to the LORD, neither day nor night, but it will come about that at evening time there will be light. And in that day living waters will flow out of Jerusalem, half of them toward the eastern sea and the other half toward the western sea; it will be in summer as well as in winter. And the LORD will be king over all the earth; in that day the LORD will be the only one, and His name the only one. Zechariah 14:6-9 (NASB)

Verse 7 says, “It will be a unique day.” It sure will be a unique day! God will turn out the heavenly lights. That is the sun, moon, and stars. Imagine armies fighting God in darkness. But when the evening comes, the lights are turned back on. At this point, the tribulation ends. The punishment of Israel ends.

THE KINGDOM FOLLOWS THE SECOND COMING OF CHRIST. Verse 8 begins to describe the millennial kingdom. At this point, Israel is restored as a kingdom. Verse 9 says the Lord will be King over all the earth. This will be victory day! Jesus will reign as King over all the world. We are also told He will be the only King. He is the “only one” and His name will be the “only one!” Praise the Lord. Revelation 20:4-6 tells us that this kingdom will last one thousand years; so, we call it the millennial kingdom. This agrees with Daniel 2:31-45; 7:9-14; Revelation 19:11-20:6; and Joel 3:9-21 which also describe the tribulation and then the one thousand year kingdom.

At this point, we have learned from our studies that Scripture teaches the rapture is followed by the tribulation, then the second coming of Christ, and the millennial kingdom. The “times of the Gentiles” will end at the second coming of Christ when Jesus then reigns as King over all the earth. Israel is now in focus.

JUDGMENT OF THE NATIONS. Now we have done this review in preparation for this question, “Who will enter the kingdom?” Let’s return to Matthew 24:31 in order to answer

the question. We have already learned that Matthew 24:29-31 describes the second coming of Christ. Starting with verse 32, Jesus continued giving the disciples more information. But we will jump to verses 37-41.

Some people think that verses 37-41 describe the rapture. Here is the passage,

For the coming of the Son of Man will be just like the days of Noah. For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and they did not understand until the flood came and took them all away; so will the coming of the Son of Man be. Then there will be two men in the field; one will be taken and one will be left. Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken and one will be left. Matthew 24:37-41 (NASB)

Here Jesus refers to Himself as the Son of Man. He just called Himself the Son of Man in verse 30 which is about the second coming. This means He is describing what will happen after the second coming in verses 37-41. In verses 38-39 we are told Noah entered the ark. Now we would think that Noah was taken away when the flood came! Right? But notice who was taken away. The ones who were taken away were those who were still on the ground below, the unrighteous or unbelievers. Genesis 6 says the flood took away and killed the unbelievers. Jesus' details are very important.

Let me add quickly that little details are important in Bible study. The benefit of reading and re-reading a passage and looking at the details is important. Good Bible study requires careful attention to details. Now let's look at verse 40. It says two men will be in the field. Carefully notice Jesus' words. He said one will be taken and one will be left. Who did Jesus say was taken away in the flood in verses 38-39? The unbelievers were taken away. So, which man did Jesus say was taken away in verse 40? The answer is the unbelieving man will be taken away and the believer will be left. The unbeliever will disappear, not the believer. The same thing happens in verse 41. The believing woman will be left. So these verses are not describing the rapture!

Then, what do these verses describe? The answer is given in Matthew 25:31-46. Before we read that passage, we need to

understand that Matthew 25 is about the millennial kingdom. For example, in Matthew 25 Jesus gives us two parables about the kingdom. The parable of the Ten Virgins is given in verses 1-13. It is about the evidence of true faith. Jesus' message is that true faith eagerly looks for the second coming of Christ. Next, the parable of Talents is given in verses 14-30. It reveals that true believers are faithful to some degree in their service to Christ. The one who is not faithful is not a believer. This is not about how to become saved. These are descriptions of how believers behave.

Matthew 25:31-47 is usually called the Judgment of the Nations or the Sheep and Goat judgment. This is an important passage because it is about the judgment that will determine who will enter the kingdom. Here are verses 31-33,

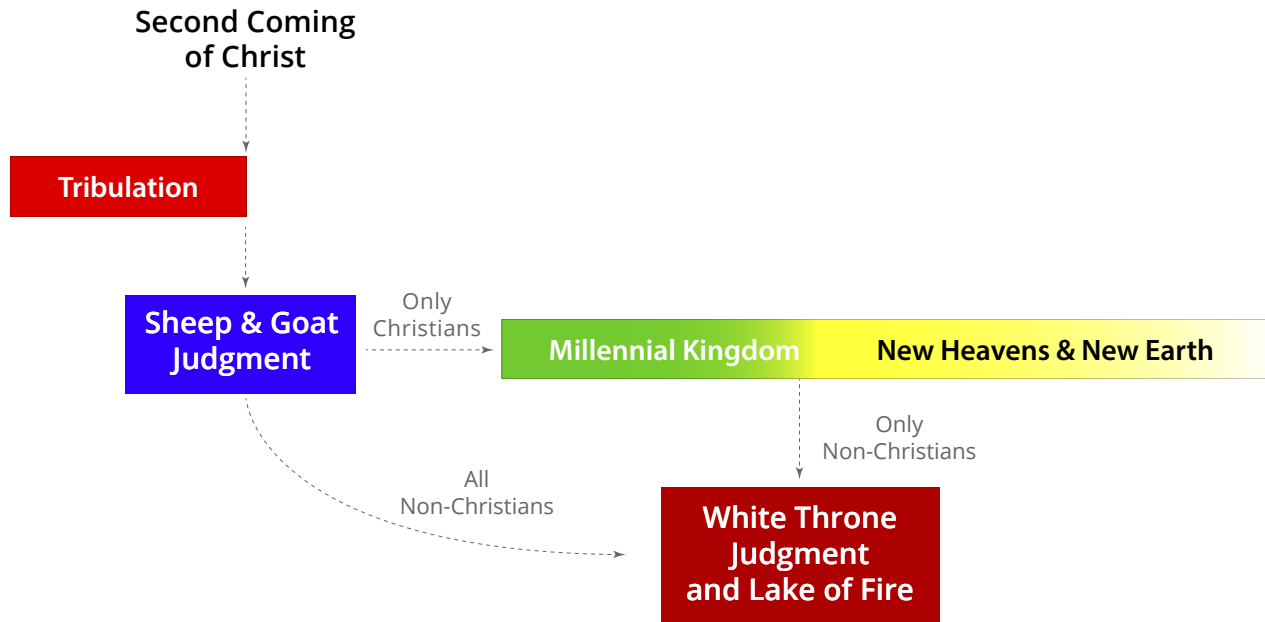
But when the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, then He will sit on His glorious throne. All the nations will be gathered before Him; and He will separate them from one another, as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats; and He will put the sheep on His right, and the goats on the left. Matthew 25:31-33 (NASB)

Notice, Jesus used some of the same words and phrases He used in Matthew 24:30-31 when he described His second coming. For example, in Matthew 24:30 He referred to Himself as the "Son of Man," and here He said, the "Son of Man." In Matthew 24:30 and here, He said He will come in glory. In Matthew 24:31 He said the angels will come with Him, and here He said the same thing. The point is that Jesus is describing His second coming in these verses.

In verse 32, Jesus said that when all the nations will be gathered, He will separate the sheep from the goats. The sheep symbolize believers, and they are put on His right side. The goats symbolize unbelievers, and they are put on His left. Then in verses 34-40 Jesus said,

Then the King will say to those on His right, 'Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. 'For I was hungry, and you gave Me something to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me something to drink; I was a stranger, and you invited Me in; naked, and you

Timeline of the Sheep and Goat Judgment & White Throne Judgment



clothed Me; I was sick, and you visited Me; I was in prison, and you came to Me.’ Then the righteous will answer Him, ‘Lord, when did we see You hungry, and feed You, or thirsty, and give You something to drink? And when did we see You a stranger, and invite You in, or naked, and clothe You? When did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?’ The King will answer and say to them, ‘Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, even the least of them, you did it to Me.’
Matthew 25:34-40 (NASB)

Three important points to notice in these verses. First verse 34 says Jesus is the king. Second, who is allowed to enter the kingdom? Verse 35 says those for whom the kingdom was prepared from the foundation of the world. The answer is those who are on His right. They are the sheep or believers. That is, only believers will be allowed to enter the kingdom. Why are they allowed to enter the kingdom? Verses 34-41 describe what they did. These are the works that believers will perform.

Then in Matthew 25:41, Jesus said,

Then He will also say to those on His left, ‘Depart from Me, accursed ones, into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels . . .’ Matthew 25:41 (NASB)

Now who does Jesus say will be taken away? Who will depart from the king? The goats on His left or unbelievers. They are sent to eternal fire or hell, which is also called the lake of fire. Please notice that the lake of fire was prepared for the devil and his angels. We will learn in a future study that the antichrist will join the devil in the lake of fire.

Now remember that Jesus said in Matthew 24:37-41 that the two men will be in the field and two women will be grinding at the mill—one will be taken away, and the other will be left behind. Jesus was teaching us in Matthew 25:31-46 that only believers alive at the end of the tribulation will be allowed to enter the millennial kingdom. Unbelievers will not be allowed to enter the millennial kingdom.

In addition, both Zechariah 14:5 and Revelation 19:14 reveal that Christians and the holy angels will come with Christ at the second coming. These Christians will be those

who were raptured before the tribulation. What a thrill this will be! Have you ever wanted to fly in the air? Imagine coming down to earth with Christ. We will have front row seats at the battle of Armageddon. This means the raptured Christians automatically enter the millennial kingdom, and the kingdom will start with both mortal and immortal believers. The mortal believers will be able to have children during the kingdom. Their children will have opportunities to believe in Christ and be saved. But some will not believe and will join Satan at the end of the kingdom in rebellion. You can read about this in Revelation 20:7-10. We are told in that passage that God will bring fire down from heaven and instantly destroy them.

CONCLUSION. So, the nation of Israel will finally have their Messiah in the kingdom. It will now be the times of the Jews. All of God's promises for the restoration of Israel will be fulfilled. Gentiles who believe in Christ will be included. Christ will rule over the world. It will be a kingdom of righteousness and peace. Isaiah 9:6-7 says,

*For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us;
And the government will rest on His shoulders;
And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Eternal Father, Prince of Peace.
There will be no end to the increase of His government or of
peace,
On the throne of David and over his kingdom,
To establish it and to uphold it with justice and righteousness
From then on and forevermore.
Isaiah 9:6-7 (NASB)*

This is the millennial kingdom. Before we end, I want to briefly share some information about this kingdom that every believer will live in some day. Ezekiel 40-48 tells us that two of the Jewish feasts will be restored. They are the feasts of Passover and Tabernacles.

All of the sacrifices will be resumed during the millennium, as a reminder of Christ's vicarious sacrifice. They will be like the Lord's Supper. Ezekiel says there will be a temple. In Isaiah 65:17-25 we are told that people will have very long lives. Peace will exist in the animal kingdom. It will be paradise on earth.

Do you remember that frequently in the gospels, the kingdom of God and the kingdom of Heaven seem to be another reference for heaven? The reason is the kingdom is spiritual and it is invisible. Believers here on earth and in heaven are in the kingdom. When the second coming of Christ occurs, Jesus will bring all of the saints with Him and set up the millennial kingdom. That is, the heavenly kingdom will become visible, and it will be spiritual, except some mortals will also be there.

Now, we are ready to return to 2 Thessalonians 2. We understand the worry of the believers who thought they had missed the rapture. Most likely they believed they had missed the kingdom. We also are ready to learn about the signs that indicate we are near the future rapture and the tribulation. We also are ready to discover what Scripture says about the anti-christ and what will happen here on earth.

These are things that God the Father wants believers to understand. He wants us to know what will happen to us. He wants to encourage us about the wonderful future awaiting us.