

# ENSCONCED AND ECSTATIC

I've always loved that word – **ensconced**. I heard my pastor use it some years ago; ever since then it has been like a mental perennial that seems to blossom year after year in my heart and mind with new beauty. It means to 'shelter or conceal' and as one who longs for the Lord's appearing, for a heavenly home, I long to be ensconced in the arms of my Savior and doubtless, you do as well.

Yet this wonderful expectation, what the Bible refers to as our 'blessed hope', has been shrouded for all of us in degrees of mystery. In fact, the Thessalonian believers were quite disturbed when they were told in error that Christ had come and they'd been left behind. The apostle Paul addressed this in his letter Second Thessalonians Chapter Two. He wrote:

*"Now, brethren, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, we ask you not to be soon shaken in mind or troubled, either by spirit or by word or by letter as it from us, as though the day of Christ had come. Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition, who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of*

*God showing himself that he is God. Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you these things? And now you know what is restraining that he may be revealed in his own time. 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. And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord will consume with the breath of His mouth and destroy with the brightness of His coming." (2Thes 2:1-8)*

As you see, he starts by reminding them concerning two things – the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, and then he says 'Don't be shaken up by others trying to convince you that the "day of Christ" (or more accurately "day of the Lord" - that is, His second coming) already came.'

He then follows with some specifics on a series of events leading up to the Day of the Lord, clarifying their order in sequence. There are four of them we need to understand:

1. A "falling away". The Greek word here is apostasia from which we get our English word 'apostasy'. The Greek word however does not necessarily mean the exact same thing as the English descendant and it has led to some debate concerning this verse. 'Apostasia' is an adjective in the ancient Greek meaning "something seperative" and is a derivative of the word 'aphistemi' meaning "to remove". It is significant to note two things about this word – first, that it is in

the feminine form and second, that its object is implied, i.e. it is not explicit in the verse but is understood based upon the context set by the previous verses.

It is used in only one other place in the New Testament – Acts 21:21 where Paul is informed of being accused of teaching believers to 'be separated' from the Law of Moses. In that case, the object is explicit and is the Mosaic Law. It could be that the object linkage in this verse may have influenced our contemporary perspective of the meaning of the word in 2 Thes 2.

Now, other scriptures such as 2 Tim 3:1; 2 Pet 3:3 and 2 Tim 3:13 make it clear that the last days church will face some serious problems from within and without. Thus, it's understandable that this passage could be considered in some aspects to be pointing to the final apostasy – certainly, the church in some areas has grown very weak and compromising. However, the church has experienced several periods of wide spread apostasy throughout its history. As an example, during the Inquisition, the church murdered millions of sincere believers.

And it should be noted that the true church of born anew believers is growing phenomenally under persecution in many parts of the world. So while some parts of the church are indeed becoming apostate, some parts are growing more fervent and fruitful. Arguably, our current apostasy is not yet universal.

So for a number of reasons, I am personally convinced that this passage in 2 Thes does not refer to the apostate church but rather to the

rapture of the true church; notice that the implied object that 'apostasia' refers to is the world for the context is clearly given by Paul in verse one as our gathering together to Christ, not our separating from Him and to faithfully interpret the scripture we must follow the author's line of thought – that's called 'context'.

(It should be noted that good Bible teachers line up on both sides of this – some, like Kenneth Weiss and Dr. E Schuyler English agree that this passage refers to the rapture while others claim it is referring to the apostate church.)

Now recall that the adjective is feminine as you would expect for it refers to the Church as the Bride of Christ separating from the world as He snatches us up to meet Him in the clouds. (See 1 Thes 4:16-18)

2. Chronologically, the event of verse seven in our passage happens at this time also. "He who restrains" is generally acknowledged to be the Holy Spirit and the word for "restrains" literally means "to hold down". Also, "...until He is taken out of the way," is equally translated 'until out of the midst He becomes'.

That is, the Holy Spirit, Who is in all true believers is holding down the lid so to speak on the full expression of evil in the world, but He is taken out of the midst and thus out of the way of the evil one. Now, He cannot be taken out of the midst of the believers or God would be lying when He said, "*Never will I leave you. Never, will I forsake you.*" (Heb 13:5) So clearly, He is

taken out of the midst of the world as He presents the church to Christ at the rapture.

Now, I am personally convinced that the Lord's Spirit will still be at work on the planet during the time of the "lawless one" – i.e. the Tribulation, because it appears that 144,000 Jewish men are sealed or anointed near the beginning of it and huge numbers of people get saved during this time as evidenced in Revelation chapter seven.

So it could be that as Abraham's servant brought Rebecca to Isaac in Genesis 24, a beautiful Old Testament picture, so the Heavenly Father's Holy Spirit will bring us to Christ. Even now, "the Spirit and the bride say, 'Come!' (Rev 22:17) to our Lord Jesus and to the unsaved. The Holy Spirit and the bride of Christ are inseparable until the bride is safely ensconced and ecstatic in the presence of her Bridegroom.

3. The revealing of the "lawless one". Next, the "man of sin," otherwise known to us as the anti-Christ, will be revealed. Thus, it is not right for believers to be looking for him in this present time. He won't be 'seen' until after we are gone. On the contrary, we are repeatedly instructed in scripture to be watching for Jesus. Now, the revealing of the AC will be at the beginning of the seven year long 'tribulation' period. Revelation chapters 6 – 19 describe it in some detail.

4. Then comes the "Day of the Lord" – that is, His second coming to earth. This could also refer to a

period of time when He pours out His judgment but if so, it still culminates in His second coming. He doesn't stop at the clouds as with the rapture. This will be the literal, awesome, forceful invasion of the earth and the complete destruction of the rebellious kingdoms of man. Christ will conquer all who oppose Him, imprison Satan and establish a 1000 year righteous reign over the remnant of sinful man.

The Rapture, Tribulation and the Second Coming or the Day of the Lord is barreling down the tracks toward us and nothing will prevent them. Let's not get rooted in this world but rather ensconced in ecstasy – His presence.