

IX. The Day of the LORD

January 19/20, 2011

1 Thessalonians 5:1-11

Aim: To live in proper anticipation of the coming of Jesus Christ on the Day of the LORD, which will result in destruction of the wicked, but complete our salvation as we live together forever with our Savior.

As history continues to unfold the eternally planned purposes of God, one event looms large on the horizon: the Day of the Lord. That event will mark the end of man's day, as God acts in judgment to take back directly control of the earth from the usurpers (both human and demonic) who presently rule it. It will be an unprecedented time of cataclysmic judgment on all unrepentant sinners. Paul's purpose in writing this section on the Day of the Lord was not primarily theological and eschatological but pastoral and practical.

In 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11, we find many of Jesus' expressions – e.g., 'times and seasons (5:1; cp. Acts 1:7); 'thief' (5:2; cp. Mt. 24:43); 'alert' or 'awake' (5:6; cp. Mt. 24:42). Given that Paul has already referred to the words of Jesus (4:15), it is probably that he had previously told the Thessalonians, when he was in Thessalonica, that much of this material is directly taken from the sayings of Jesus.

A. The Day of the LORD Comes with Destruction (1 Th. 5:1-3)

The day of the Lord will come at an unknown time (5:1) and unexpectedly (5:2-3).

1. Times and Seasons (5:1)

But concerning the times and the seasons, brethren, you have no need that I should write to you.

This is the third section in a row that includes 'but concerning' (*περί δέ, peri de*, see 4:9; 4:13). The apostle uses this phrase frequently in his writings to signal a change of subject (e.g., 1 Cor. 7:1, 25; 8:1; 12:1; 16:1, 12).

The expressions 'the times and the seasons' is a standard formula in which there is no significant difference of meaning intended between 'times' and 'seasons' (see Dan. 2:21; 7:12; Acts 1:7). However, there is a subtle difference in meaning between them. *Chronōs* (*χρόνον*, 'the times') refers to chronological time, to clock time or calendar time. *Kairōs* (*καιρόν*, 'the seasons'), on the other hand, views time in terms of events, eras, or seasons, such as the times of the Gentiles (cp. Luke 21:24). Taken together, the two terms suggest that the Thessalonians were curious about the timing of the end-time events.

Their query concerned times and dates related to the coming day of the Lord. Their reason for wanting this information was intensely practical. They knew that Jesus' return would be an awesome event, and they wanted to be better prepared for it. Perhaps they felt knowledge of the precise timescale for the last things would be an indispensable aid to preparation for the events themselves. In this line of thinking, a deadline forces us to settle on our priorities and pursue them ruthlessly. However, date-setting is a pointless exercise. Their mistake lay in supposing that the best way to be ready for His coming was to know its exact time.

Paul and his helpers had obviously made it very clear while with them that the precise timing of Jesus' return was something that only the Father knew (Mt. 24:36), evidently basing their

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teaching on the transmitted words of Jesus.. The Thessalonians did not need to know when the Day of the Lord would come; they already knew all that God intended them to know. To know when the day of the Lord will come would foster spiritual indifference if it were still a long way off, or panic if it were coming soon. Being spiritually prepared for the return of Christ does not involve date-setting, clock-watching, or sign seeking. God has chosen not to reveal the specific time of end-time events so that all believers will live in constant anticipation of them.

2. Thief in the Night (5:2)

a) *Day of the LORD (5:2a)*

For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord...

Paul does not speak of the *parousia*, the presence or coming of the Lord, but of ‘the day of the Lord.’ Paul is not introducing a new subject, but just reiterating and reminding them of his previous teaching and that of Jesus. Paul’s use of this expression, which has its roots in the Old Testament, is quite deliberate. It was the day when the LORD Yahweh would vindicate His righteous cause and execute impartial judgment. It is mentioned explicitly nineteen times in the Old Testament (cp. Is. 2:12; 13:6, 9; Ez. 13:5; 30:3; Joel 1:15; 2:1, 11, 31; 3:14; Amos 5:18 [twice], 20; Ob. 15; Zeph. 1:7, 14 [twice]; Zech. 14:1; Mal. 4:5) and four times in the New Testament (cp Acts 2:20; 2 Th. 2:2; 2 Pe. 3:10). It is impossible to read it here without a deep sense of foreboding. It commonly applies to God breaking into history to judge His enemies and save His people. The day of the Lord is characteristically a day of wrath and destruction for rebellious individuals and nations, and at the same time a day of salvation and deliverance for His people. Paul uses ‘day’ in his letters to emphasize the dual themes of future salvation for those saved by grace and future judgment for the ultimately unrepentant.

In early Christian usage, with the acknowledgement of Jesus as Lord, Jesus was viewed as the *κύριος* (*kyrios*, ‘Lord’) whose day it was; hence, in addition to being called the Day of the Lord (cp. 1 Th. 2:2; 1 Cor. 5:5; 2 Pe. 3:10), it is called ‘the day of Christ’ (Phil. 1:10; 2:16), ‘the day of Jesus Christ’ (Phil. 1:6), ‘the day of our Lord Jesus’ (2 Cor. 1:14), ‘the day of our Lord Jesus Christ’ (1 Cor. 1:8). Where the context is sufficient, it is sometimes referred to simply as ‘the day’ (v. 4; Rom. 13:12; 1 Cor. 3:13; Heb. 10:25) or ‘that day’ (2 Th. 1:10). It is, in other words, the day of Christ’s revelation in glory, when He comes to vindicate His people and judge the world in righteousness (cp. Acts 17:31).

A day of unbridled terror for the unbeliever will, at one and the same time, be a day of boundless joy for those who know that it spells the completion of their deliverance from sin and the imminence of their never-ceasing union with the God they love.

In the New Testament, the day of the Lord is intimately connected with the coming of the Lord Jesus. In his second letter to the Thessalonians, Paul actually identifies the day of the Lord with the *parousia* (2 Th. 2:1ff.). For those who have not believed the gospel, the day of the Lord will be one of fierce wrath and terror. But for believers, it will be a day of joy and reunion (2 Th. 1:9-10).

Paul says that the Thessalonians knew ‘full well’ or ‘perfectly’ that the Day of the Lord would arrive unexpectedly. The Greek word for ‘full well’ (*ἀκριβώς*, *akribōs*) describes careful, accurate, painstaking research (cp. Mt. 2:8; Lk. 1:3; Acts 18:25).

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b) Thief in the Night (5:2b)

...so comes as a thief in the night.

The ‘thief’ (κλέπτης, *kleptēs*) metaphor was one Jesus Himself had used when teaching His disciples about His coming (Luke 12:39; Mt. 24:43). It is also used elsewhere in the New Testament (cp. 2 Pe. 3:10; Rev. 3:3; 16:15). It naturally suggests unexpectedness, surprise, alarm, and devastation. It is intended to teach us that this is an event which will catch a great many people unawares. The point of the comparison is a call for vigilance. The day of the Lord will come upon people suddenly, unexpectedly, and with devastating effect; therefore, it is important to be on the alert and not be taken by surprise.

3. “Peace and Safety” (5:3a)

For when they say, “Peace and safety!” then sudden destruction comes upon them...

The state of the mass of mankind at the coming of the Lord will be one of unsuspecting tranquility. Non-Christians (‘they’) will be unaware and in a spiritual stupor; hence, they will be unprepared for, and surprised at, the Second Coming. People will be eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage just as they were in Noah’s day before the flood (Mt. 24:38), just as though everything was always going to carry on as it always had (2 Pe. 3:4).

The day appointed for the close of human history will dawn like any other day. Normality will be the keynote. The human race will go about its collective business as it always has done. From the perspective of most people, the end will come when they least expect. This is how Paul pictures it, using ‘peace (εἰρήνη, *eirēnē*) and safety (ἀσφάλεια, *asphaleia*)’ to express a false sense of security (cp. Ez. 13:10; Jer. 6:14). Contentment reigns, all’s well! This only means that mankind at large has entertained a false sense of security.

This, of course, is the state of increasing numbers in our day. As secularism chokes out any belief in an avenging God, and as the church shies away from declaring the certainty of future judgment, the thought of a final day of reckoning fades increasingly from the consciousness of men and women.

Destruction will be the fate of the unprepared in the day of the Lord. The term for ‘destruction’ (ὄλεθρος, *olethros*) does not suggest obliteration or annihilation, as some contend. Rooted in Old Testament images of God’s historical judgments, it points to the overwhelming of men and women with suffering, death, and loss. When God destroys His enemies He brings about their complete ruin (cp. 2 Th. 1:9). The person who is destroyed continues to exist but is damaged beyond repairs. He does not become a non-person, but the wreck of a human being. When God pours out His wrath on unrepentant sinners, they will not be annihilated so much as ruined. It does not mean the destruction of being, but of well-being (cp. 1 Tim. 6:9); not the end of existence, but the destruction of the purpose for existence. God will accomplish the destruction of unbelievers by casting them into the eternal torment of hell, where they will be finally and completely separated from God forever.

4. Labor Pains (5:3b)

...as labor pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape.

The imagery of ‘labor pains’ (ὥδίν, *ōdīn*) is used in different, but overlapping ways in the bible. Sometimes it notes the difficulties which precede a *positive* outcome (e.g., John 16:21; Gal.

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4:19). Elsewhere, it refers to pains that once begun, will continue to an *inevitable* outcome (e.g., Mic. 4:9-10; 5:3; Mark 13:8). Finally, a description of the labor process is used to emphasize the *unexpected terror*, panic, and helplessness of an enemy of God at the time when God comes in power for judgment (e.g., Ps. 48:6; Js. 13:4-8; 42:13-14; Jer. 48:41). This final use of ‘labor pains’ is in view here. Christ’s judgment will come, and there will be no escaping it.

Elsewhere, the image of the birth pangs of a pregnant women is used in the Bible to express the pain and agony of an unpleasant experience (cp. Ps. 48:6; Is. 13:8; Jer. 6:24). This thought is present here, too, but uppermost in Paul’s mind is probably the suddenness with which birth pangs come upon an expectant mother more or less without warning. The threatened destruction will break upon men and women in just that way. And there will be no escape. Just as birth pains unavoidably come upon a mother-to-be, so there will be no escape from the Lord when He comes.

Paul’s concern at this point was to show that the day of the Lord is inevitable. Once the mother-to-be starts to experience the contractions that mark the onset of labor, she can be sure that a process is under way which cannot be reversed. The onset is sudden and the outcome is inescapable. In the same way, once the end of all things is upon us, it will be too late for those who are not prepared to escape the inevitable outcome.

B. The Day of the LORD Affects Two Groups of People (1 Th. 5:4-8)

Paul does not want his readers to be disturbed at the prospect of the Lord’s return. The fact that they cannot know the exact day or hour when it will take place does not mean they should doubt their own safety or salvation when it does come. In this passage, Paul contrasts night people (unbelievers) with day people (believers). Night people are associated with darkness, sleep, and drunkenness; day people with light, alertness, and soberness. The truth that unbelievers are in darkness and believers in the light has its roots in the Old Testament (e.g., Ps. 107:10-12; Is. 9:2; cp. also Luke 1:76-79; Mt. 4:12-16; John 8:12).

1. Brethren Not in Darkness (5:4)

But you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief.

The ‘day’ (*ἡμέρα, ēmera*) that Paul refers to here is the Day of the Lord. Paul tells the Thessalonian Christians that what he has been saying about the destructive, thief-like coming of the Lord does not apply to them. They belong to a different category of people from those who will be overwhelmed by judgment. For one thing, it will not surprise them like a thief. True, they do not know the precise timing of the Lord’s appearance, and so it will indeed come upon them with an element of surprise. But it will not be the surprise of total unexpectedness, the surprise of a thief invading without warning upon unsuspecting victims. Christians know the Lord is coming, and though He appears suddenly at a time when they are not anticipating Him, His coming will not be a total surprise to them because they will not be unprepared.

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2. Two Peoples Contrasted (5:5-8a)

a) Day/Light vs. Night/Dark (5:5)

You are all sons of light and sons of the day. We are not of the night nor of darkness.

This is because they are not in darkness as other people are. Typically Paul uses the term ‘darkness’ (νυκτός, *nuktos*) to refer to spiritual ignorance and insensitivity (cp. 2 Th. 1:8; Eph. 2:12; 4:19). By the grace of God, believers are no longer living in darkness or in ‘night’ (σκότους, *skotous*).

On the contrary, Paul’s readers are sons of light and sons of the day, and do not belong to the darkness or the night. A great change has happened to Christians. They have moved from a realm of darkness into a realm of light.

Just as to be in darkness is to be spiritually ignorant and insensitive, so to be in the light is to be in a condition of knowledge, righteousness, acceptance, and life (cp. 2 Cor. 4:6). In ancient times, people were called ‘sons’ or something or someone when they shared its characteristics. It was an idiomatic Hebrew expression describing the dominant influence in a person’s life (e.g., Mt. 23:15; Lk. 16:8; Jn. 12:36; Eph. 5:8; Col. 3:6). Thus to describe believers as ‘sons of light’ (υἱοὶ φωτός, *huiioi phōtos*) or the synonym ‘sons of day’ (υἱοὶ ἡμέρας, *huiioi ēmeras*) is to say that light is the dominant influence in their lives. Christians are sons of the light not only because they are in the light, but also because they have actually come to be like the light. Furthermore, the light has become their proper destiny (cp. Col. 1:12)

At the metaphorical level, throughout this passage, Paul takes ‘day’ from the expression ‘day of the Lord,’ and uses it to denote a contrast between day and night, light and dark, being awake and asleep. The day in view is almost certainly the day of the Lord about which Paul has been speaking. Christians belong to that day in a special sense. It will be for them a day of resurrection and triumph. The night which they have escaped, on the other hand, is the night of sin and judgment.

In the second half of this verse, Paul makes the transition from the second person (‘you’) used in the previous verses to the first person (‘we’). This transition moves the text from talking explicitly about the Thessalonians to applying the teaching to all Christians.

b) Watch/Sober vs. Sleep/Drunk (5:6-8a)

Therefore let us not sleep, as others do, but let us watch and be sober. For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk are drunk at night. But let us who are of the day be sober...

Paul’s point in these verses is that there is behavior that belongs to the night and behavior that belongs to the day. Those who belong to the night sleep and get drunk. Blissfully unaware of what is happening or about to happen, they indulge their sensual appetites. But Christians are not to be like others. We cannot live in the same way others do. Ours is not to be a lifestyle of slumber and drunkenness, but by contrast, we are to be self-controlled and alert. Paul thus exhorts the Thessalonians to live consistently with their new natures. The present tense verbs indicate that the Thessalonians were to be continuously awake, alert, and sober.

How can we prepare for the end? In essence, Paul’s message is that our reaction to the final cataclysm will depend entirely upon our attitude. Most people, says Paul, are unprepared. They are caught out by the stealthy burglar because they are in the dark, asleep, or drunk. These are

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different ways of describing the plight of the person who is not alive to God. Darkness is an effective way of describing his state of mind. As far as spiritual reality is concerned, he cannot see clearly. The spiritual night that engulfs unbelievers includes both intellectual and moral darkness. It is the intellectual darkness of ignorance on the one hand, and the moral darkness of sin on the other; of not knowing what is true, and of not doing what is right.

In the same way, he is unresponsive to the promptings of God, like a man in a deep sleep who cannot be roused. The term ‘sleep’ (*καθεύδωμεν, katheudōmen*) is a different word than the one used to refer metaphorically to ‘death’ in 4:13-15. It is not surprising to find the unbeliever asleep in spiritual indifference, living as if there will be no judgment.

He also resembles the drunk because his mind is befuddled. Just as the person who is intoxicated cannot relate to his surroundings, a person who does not know God is incapable of responding to the overtures of grace. Sadly, though they are asleep to spiritual reality, night people are wide awake to the lusts of the flesh, resulting in a drunken stupor.

This state of mind is not universal. Paul did not suppose, for instance, that it characterized his friends in Thessalonica. As day people, the Thessalonians had been delivered out of the dark night of sin, ignorance, rebellion, and unbelief. It was the ‘others’ (*λοιποί, loipoi*), that is the rest of humankind, who were so afflicted.

Day people are called to be alert. *Grēgoreō* (*γρηγορεω, ‘alert’*), the source of the name ‘Gregory,’ means to be awake or watchful. Unlike the slumbering witless night people, day people are awake and able to rightly assess what is happening in the spiritual dimension. They are also sober. To be ‘sober’ means to be free from the influence of intoxicants. A sober person exhibits self-control, lives a serious, balanced, calm, steady life, and maintains proper priorities. To be sober is to be alert; the two terms are essentially synonyms.

All of these imperatives make the same general point. People who belong to the ‘day’ will be awake and be sober, and will not be asleep or drunk. People of the ‘day’ will be awake and alert to the Lord and will lead their lives accordingly (cp. 1 Pe. 5:8), with ‘spiritual sobriety’ (Calvin). People of the ‘night’ will be characterized by spiritual and moral laxity. They will live as if their minds are unconcerned with God, or with their own spiritual state, and as though there were no future judgment.

The prospect of the Lord’s coming should make us mentally alert and watchful. We are not to search frenetically for signs of His appearing, but we are always to live knowing that He will come soon. We are to be like soldiers watching vigilantly at our posts, fearful that we should be overtaken by the surprise visit of our commanding officer. We need to be in control of all our faculties. We are to live temperate and balanced lives, not enslaved by our passions but rulers over them.

3. Protective Armor (5:8b)

...putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet the hope of salvation.

Paul urged the members of the church of Thessalonica to prepare for the coming day of the Lord, not by trying to fix the date, but by putting themselves on the alert. This explains his portrait of the soldier. The Christian is like a man on sentry duty. It is his responsibility to keep himself awake and on the lookout.

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For Paul, the image of a soldier on duty standing on watchful alert pictures perhaps better than anything the attitude Christians ought to have as they wait for the Lord (cp. also Paul's allusion to Is. 59:17). Faith, love, and hope are the spiritual armor that we are to wear as we wait for the Lord. The best way to prepare ourselves for the Lord's coming is not by trying to fathom dates and times, but by ensuring that we are spiritually alert and well protected.

Here the armor is purely defensive: the head and the trunk are covered. The essential point is that he is protected against surprise concerning the coming of Christ and the end of this present scheme of things. As in 1:3, Paul again uses the threefold combination of 'faith' (*πίστεως, pisteōs*), 'love' (*ἀγάπες, agapēs*), and 'hope' (*ἐλπίδα, elpida*). Faith, love, and hope are the three great Christian virtues. 'Faith' refers to faith in Christ and 'love' most likely refers to a proper love of man. 'Hope of salvation' points to the complete salvation that Christians will receive at the Second Coming, as the following verse confirms.

The soldier's breastplate protected his vital organs, the area where he was most vulnerable. It was the ancient equivalent of a bulletproof vest. Faith and love are to serve as a breastplate for us, steadying and strengthening the heart. The obvious function of a soldier's helmet was to protect his head from blows that otherwise might crush his skull. The hope of our salvation is to act as a helmet, protecting the mind against doubt and despair.

Faith, love, and hope form the supreme triad of Christian virtues (cp. 1:3; 1 Cor. 13:13). They also provide an excellent defense against temptation. Faith is trust in God's power, promises, and plan. It is the unwavering belief that God is completely trustworthy in all that He says and does. While faith forms the hard protective outer surface of a Christian's breastplate, love is its soft inner lining. Love toward God involves delight in and devotion to God as the supreme object of affection. Love and faith form an impenetrable barrier against temptation; it is only when one or both are lacking that Christians fall victim to sin. The hope of salvation worn as a helmet does not have in view the past aspect of salvation (justification), or its present aspect (sanctification), but rather its future aspect (glorification). The person who possesses faith, hope, and love is armed and ready to face a future which will destroy those who do not share this vital equipment.

C. The Day of the LORD Comes with Salvation (1 Th. 5:9-11)

1. Salvation, Not Wrath (5:9-10a)

For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us...

Ultimately, our hope of being saved in the day of the Lord rests in God's purpose or appointment. Paul's use of the word 'appoint' (*tithēmi*) expresses the inexorable outworking of God's sovereign plan for believers' salvation. It points to the concept of election and reminds us that our salvation originates in God Himself. The God who has loved, chosen, and called us has destined us not to suffer wrath but to obtain salvation (cp. Eph. 1:4-5). God the Father does not simply plan the future; He also works out His plan in history. It was 'through the [work of the] Lord Jesus Christ' that our salvation was 'obtained' (*περιποίησιν, peripoiēsin*) or effected. Paul's description of Christ 'who died for us' is the most explicit statement of Christ's substitutionary atonement in the Thessalonian letters. The glorious message of the gospel is that

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Christ's substitutionary death paid in full the penalty for believers' sins and therefore believers will not face God's judgment and the wrath that was their due.

For all who are not God's people, the day of the Lord will be a day of fierce wrath. *Orgē* (ὀργή, 'wrath') does not refer to a momentary outburst of rage, but to an abiding and settled habit of mind. It is a general reference to the final judgment, when God's wrath will be poured out on the wicked. His wrath toward unrepentant sinners is His just response to their sinfulness. But for those who believe, the coming day of the Lord will be a day to receive the salvation God has appointed for them. Every Christian can rejoice in this certainty.

Here Paul is thinking of salvation in its final and fullest sense, sometimes referred to by scholars as eschatological salvation. 'Salvation' (σωτηρίας, *sōtērias*) here emphasizes the future aspect of salvation that includes God's 'saving' us from 'wrath.' Our salvation includes all the blessings of the gospel—present life in Christ and future life with Christ; the indwelling Spirit maintaining the former and guaranteeing the latter. Any view of salvation that is limited to present enjoyment of pardon falls short of the fuller biblical picture. God's salvation finds fulfillment in the restored universe, in the perfected kingdom to come.

2. Together with Christ (5:10b)

...that whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with Him.

Paul goes on to present a further purpose of the atonement. The apostle describes salvation as living together with Christ. He is referring specifically to our being with Christ at the Second Coming and beyond. 'Whether we wake or sleep' refers to whether believers are alive or have physically died at the time of the Second Coming. These words echo those at the end of 4:17, 'and thus we shall be forever with the Lord.' Paul's point is that the same positive end of being with Christ in the new heavens and earth awaits all Christians.

3. Comfort One Another (5:11)

Therefore comfort each other and edify one another, just as you also are doing.

Paul ends this passage with similar language to the concluding words of the previous section (cp. 4:18). The Greek word behind 'comfort' is *parakaleō* (παρακαλεω), which has the two primary nuances of 'exhort' and 'comfort.' By 'edify' (οἰκοδομεῖν, *oikodomein*), Paul means to help one another grow spiritually.

The Thessalonians are to encourage one another as they struggle with doubts and fears connected with the coming day of the Lord. From what Paul has written, they know that they need not dread being found unprepared. The day of the Lord will not surprise them as it will others.

The Christian Advent hope has been enriched with elements from the OT expectation of the Day of the Lord; indeed, that very expression had been taken over into the Christian vocabulary, the 'Lord' being now understood as Jesus. This, then, is how we are to wait for the coming of the Lord. We are not to be distracted into sign-seeking or time-keeping. The children of light—those whose lives are lived in the sight of God and in conformity with His will—are always in a state of preparedness for the great day: they do not know when it will come, but it will not take them at a disadvantage. Rather, we are to keep alert and self-controlled, always alive with the confident hope that the coming day will bring to us the salvation of being forever with the Lord.

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D. Postscript: A Pre-Millennial View (quoting John MacArthur)

Having answered their questions about the Rapture in the previous passage (4:13-18), Paul now dealt with the Thessalonians' concerns about the day of the Lord. From the blessed event of the catching away of the church, Paul turns to the horrible event that follows it—the destruction of the wicked rejecters of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Times and Seasons: that both nouns are plural indicates that many different time periods (cp. Dan. 7:25; 9:24-27; 12:7, 11-12; Rev. 11:2-3; 13:5) and events (e.g., the Rapture, the rise of the Antichrist, the salvation of Israel, the seal, trumpet, and bowl judgments, the Second Coming, the battle of Armageddon, the sheep and the goat judgment, the binding of Satan, the millennial kingdom, the loosing of Satan and subsequent worldwide rebellion at the end of the Millennium, the Great White Throne judgment, and the new heavens and the new earth) make up the end times. In verse 4 of this passage, Paul reassured them that they would not experience the Day of the Lord.

Thief: The metaphor of a thief coming is never used to refer to the Rapture of the church. It describes the coming of the Lord in judgment at the end of the seven-year Tribulation period, and the judgment at the end of the thousand-year kingdom of Christ on earth (2 Pe. 3:10). A thief coming is not a hopeful, joyful event of deliverance, but an unexpected calamity.

Day of the Lord: The Day of the Lord is the time when God pours out His fury on the wicked. It must be distinguished from 'the day of Christ' (Phil. 1:10; 2:16), the 'day of Christ Jesus' (Phil. 1:6), the 'day of the Lord Jesus' (1 Cor. 5:5), and the 'day of our Lord Jesus Christ' (1 Cor. 1:8); all of those terms refer to the time when believers will receive their rewards from the Lord Jesus Christ (Rom. 14:10; 1 Cor. 3:11-14; 4:1-5; 2 Cor. 5:9-10). The Day of the Lord must also be distinguished from the 'day of God' (2 Pe. 3:12), which refers to the eternal state.

Unlike the Rapture, which will not be preceded by any signs, there will be several precursors that will herald the arrival of the eschatological Day of the Lord. They will not, however, reveal the specific time that it will come. [DSB Note: if the Rapture occurs just before the start of the seven-year Tribulation, and the Day of the Lord comes at the close of the seven-year Tribulation, how can there be any generic signs regarding the approaching Day of the Lord that does not precede the Rapture, which will be the seven-year countdown event to the big finale?]

The first sign that the Day of the Lord is drawing near will be the appearance of an Elijah-like forerunner (Mal. 4:5). This had a historical fulfillment in John the Baptist, but will also have a future fulfillment in the end times. He will herald the imminent return of the Lord Jesus Christ and the arrival of the Day of the Lord that precedes it.

Second, a worldwide rebellion against God and His Word will precede the Day of the Lord. The apostasy will include a worldwide system of false religion (cp. 2 Th. 2:2-3). Third, the Day of the Lord will not come until 'the man of lawlessness is revealed' (2 Th. 2:3-4). The rise of Antichrist and his desecration of the Temple (Dan. 9:27; 11:31; 12:11; Mt. 24:15) will precede the coming of the Day of the Lord.

Fourth, the nations will begin to assemble in the valley of decision for the battle of Armageddon (Joel 3:2-14). Fifth, dramatic signs in the heavens will precede the coming of the Day of the Lord (cp. Joel 2:30-31; Is. 13:10; Mt. 24:29; Lk. 21:25; Rev. 6:12-13; 8:12). These signs include a proliferation of false teachers, false prophets, and false religions; the coming of Antichrist and his rise to power; war, misery, suffering, famines, earthquakes, other natural disasters, and death;

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the martyrdom of many of the Tribulation believers; and the preaching of the gospel and the conversion of many during the Tribulation.

Believers should be comforted by the reality that they will be raptured before the coming of the Day of the Lord and not experience its horrors. Yet the knowledge that the event looms large on the prophetic horizon should also motivate them to evangelize the lost. The tragic reality is that those who reject the Lord Jesus Christ will experience God's temporal and eternal wrath.

For next time: Read 1 Thessalonians 5:12-22.