

1 Thessalonians 5:1-11 Answers The Day of the Lord

Introduction:

What is eschatology? Eschatology is the study of end time events. *Eschaton* is the Greek word for “last”, so it is a study of last things. This section of Thessalonians runs from 4:13 to 5:11 and concerns future events (prophecy) related to Jesus’ Second Coming.

Perspective: When it comes to end times events, the ecumenical creeds do not say much. What they do say (and agree on) is that **1)** Jesus will come back, **2)** the dead will be resurrected, **3)** there will be judgment and **4)** God’s people will spend eternity with God. These are essentially the same four points that Paul makes in 1 Thessalonians 4-5. The Bible elsewhere says considerable more than this, but there are widely divergent schools of interpretation on the rest of it.

Two Comings of Jesus: Just because you read in the New Testament about the “coming” of Jesus does not necessarily mean you are reading about His Second Coming. There are two types of Jesus’ coming: universal and localized, physical and metaphysical, visible and invisible. Jesus already “came” in localized judgment against unbelieving Judaism in A.D. 70. This localized coming was not in person, not bodily. Jesus “himself” (4:16) did not appear. Instead, Jesus’ agents of judgment were the armies of the Roman Empire. Our passage today seems to be all about the Second Appearing of Jesus, a yet future universal event, when Jesus will again come in person.

******How will the day of the Lord come (5:1-11)?** It will come with certainty and without warning. For some people it will result in sudden destruction and wrath. However, for God’s people it will be a day of salvation. This whole section of Thessalonians (4:12-5:11) is about the encouragement Christians should get from the fact of the future return of Jesus.

1. Why was there no need to write anything concerning the times and the seasons (5:1)? See 5:2, Acts 1:7. There was no need because they were already aware that the day of the Lord would **1)** certainly come (it is inevitable) and **2)** that the time of its coming is unknowable (unpredictable).

Times and Seasons: The Greek behind times and seasons (5:1), *chronos* and *kairos*, is sort of a formula phrase used for end time events (Bess, p. 204). For instance, it is also found in Acts 1:7.

ESV Acts 1:7 . . . It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority.

Learning from History: Influential American Baptist preacher and student of prophecy William Miller famously predicted Jesus’ return by October 22, 1844. His calculations must have been very convincing because he had a following of between 50,000 and 500,000 people. People even sold their property, thinking they would not need it any more. You can guess what happened next. Miller was wrong. It is called the Great Disappointment. People wept and were dismayed and distraught. A more recent example of failed date setting can be found in the teachings of the late radio broadcaster Harold Camping, who loudly predicted Jesus’ return first in 1994 and then again in

2011. The Jehovah's Witnesses also made several failed predictions of Jesus' return. What we can learn from this is not to foolishly set dates for the Second Coming.

2. What does it mean for something to happen like a thief in the night (5:2)? The thief's coming in the middle of the night is unexpected and unwelcome (*ESV Study Bible*, p. 2310). For unbelievers the day of the Lord will not be a good thing.

ESV 2 Peter 3:10 . . . the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed.

3. What is the prophetic significance of the phrase the day of the Lord (5:2)? See *Isaiah 13:6-16, 27:2-13, Jeremiah 30:8-9, Joel 1:13-15, 2:1-11, 2:31-32, Obadiah 15-21, Malachi 4:5*. It is essentially a time of judgment (Best, p. 206). The phrase "the day of the Lord" was frequently used by Old Testament prophets with reference to various days of judgment by God upon the disobedient that resulted in the salvation of the righteous (*ESV Study Bible*, p. 2310). All Old Testament predictions and fulfillments of the day of the Lord were types of the final day of the Lord.

Technical Note: The Greek construction used here for the day of the Lord (*hémema kuriou*) is different from that used by John in Revelation 1:10 (*kuriakos héméra*), where it refers to Sunday.

4. How is the day of the Lord (5:1-11) different from the coming of the Lord (4:13-18)?

Apparently there is no difference. Paul seemingly used both terms to describe the same future events (the coming of the Lord, the resurrection of the dead, the rapture of the church and eternity with the Lord). When Paul paralleled the Day of the Lord with Jesus' return, he was saying it would be a time of judgment for the wicked and salvation for the righteous.

Technical Note: Dispensational Futurists are unique in teaching 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 is not about the Second Coming. They hold that first the church is raptured from the earth and the dead in Christ are raised, but then a great seven year tribulation takes place on earth before finally the Second Coming happens. In response:

- 1) It is noteworthy that no one ever discovered a seven year gap between the rapture and the Second Coming for the first 1,850 years of the church's existence. It was not until the mid-1800's that this theory was proposed.
- 2) It is quite possible the tribulation period occurred back in the first century in events leading up to the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70.
- 3) The text explicitly states that these events are wrapped up in the "coming" of our Lord (4:15).
- 4) The Lord "himself" is said to descend (4:16).
- 5) Such a teaching goes against all the ecumenical creeds.

5. In 5:3, how did Paul describe the suddenness of the destruction that will come? See *Isaiah 13:6-8*. It will come even as they are saying "peace and security", like labor pains come upon a pregnant woman. The world does not believe Jesus will return and will deny it right up to the very moment He comes.

ESV **Isaiah 13:6-8** Wail, for the day of the LORD is near; as destruction from the Almighty it will come! Therefore all hands will be feeble, and every human heart will melt. They will be dismayed: pangs and agony will seize them; they will be in anguish like a woman in labor.

According to 5:4-7, who should not be surprised by the coming of the day of the Lord? We believers should not be surprised in the sense that it overtakes us unpleasantly like a thief in the night. We don't know when it will be, but we can be expectant and prepared.

6. How is it that unbelievers will be unprepared but believers will not be (5:2-7)? No one knows where Jesus will return. However, believers are not unprepared for it because both Jesus and His apostles promised that Jesus will return. Unbelievers are either unaware of this fact or do not believe it and thus are in the dark and unprepared. They will be caught off guard and in denial (**Joke:** De Nile of course is a river in Egypt and what these unbelievers will be doing in that river is anyone's guess).

What application did Paul have in 5:6? We are to keep awake and be sober.

7. With respect to what are to 1) keep awake and 2) be sober (5:6)? Compare 2 Peter 3:10-14, Revelation 16:15. We are to keep awake and sober with respect to being always prepared for Jesus to return (which could happen at any time).

ESV **Revelation 16:15** Behold, I am coming like a thief! Blessed is the one who stays awake . . .

ESV **2 Peter 3:10-14** . . . what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God . . . according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. Therefore, beloved, since you are waiting for these, be diligent to be found by him without spot or blemish, and at peace.

Being sober suggests we are neither overly excited on one hand (like the Millerites, Sid Roth, Jack Van Impe or Hal Lindsey) nor indifferent on the other (asleep), but steady and sane, doing one's duty and fulfilling one's ministry (Hendriksen, p 125).

Evangelist George Whitefield was known for retiring early. Someone supposedly asked him would he still retire early if he knew for a fact that Jesus would return in the morning. Whitefield replied that yes, he would, because he already tried to live every day as if it were his last.

8. What is being sober associated with in 5:8? Soberly awaiting the day of the Lord is associated with faith and love and hope.

Why might Paul have used the analogy of military gear here (5:8)? A.T. Robertson suggested a key feature of being sober is being watchful and prepared, thus bringing to mind the figure of a sentry, on guard and armed (Hendriksen, p. 126).

9. Specifically with respect to what did the Thessalonians need to have faith (5:8)? They needed to stand firm in faith regarding the fate of deceased believers and the sure return of Jesus to rescue His people.

10. Why might the Thessalonians have been tempted to lose their love (5:8)? Perhaps uncertainty over deceased loved one's fate had discouraged them and their love had grown cold with disappointment.

What is biblical hope (5:8)? Biblical hope carries the idea of confident expectation, not wishful thinking.

11. Based on 5:9, why can we have hope of salvation (5:8)? *See 1:9-10.* We can have a confident expectation of salvation because God has destined us not for wrath but salvation through Jesus.

ESV 1 Thessalonians 1:10 . . . Jesus . . . delivers us from the wrath to come.

12. What does it mean to be destined (5:9) for something? If something is destined to happen it has been determined beforehand or preordained or at least directed toward a given end ("the plane is destined for Birmingham"). Destined is from *tithémi* and means to appoint, to present, to lay aside, to establish. Those who believe in Jesus have been destined for salvation, not wrath.

The Thessalonians were secure in Christ. They had been chosen (1:4), called (2:12, 4:7) and destined (5:9).

ESV **John 10:27-29** I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand.

What is wrath (5:9)? It is from *orgé* and with respect to God is His divine reaction to evil and has to do with judgment. It is not so much an emotion as the outcome of an angry frame of mind (BAGD, p. 549).

13. Who will get God's wrath (5:9)? *See 2:14-16, 5:3, 2 Thessalonians 1:7-8.* Those who walk in darkness, who sleep spiritually, who are unprepared for Jesus' coming, will experience God's wrath.

ESV 2 Thessalonians 1:7-9 (refers to when) the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might . . .

14. According to 5:10 why and for whom did Jesus die? Jesus died **1)** for us **2)** so that we might live with Him.

Limiting the Atonement: Everyone (except heretics) limits the atonement in some way. Unitarians falsely say Jesus died for all sins and all people. The Calvinist understanding is that Jesus died for all sins, but not all people (he died "for us", 5:10, not for unbelievers). The Arminian understanding is that Jesus died for all people, but not all sins (the one sin of unbelief is what sends a person to hell).

15. How are those asleep in 5:10 different from those asleep in 5:6? *See back to 4:13-16.* The awake are living believers and the asleep are believers who have died. It is a little confusing that Paul used this terminology since just previously he used awake and asleep to distinguish between the spiritually dead and the spiritually alive (5:6-7).

So What?

16. What is the inspired application to this section on the day of the Lord (5:11)? *See 4:13, 4:18.* “Therefore” we are to encourage one another (to stay watchful) and build one another up (in faith and love). Jesus is coming back! Paul’s purpose in writing was to encourage them. Any study of end times events should leave us encouraged, not dismayed!

Notice the “one another” here (5:11). It is everyone’s job. We are all deputized. Paul did not single out church leaders as if this were their special duty.

What will happen to those who are asleep in Jesus (5:10)? They also will live with Jesus. Paul’s point in writing this whole section was to encourage the church with the truth that those who die before Jesus’ return won’t miss out on anything! Only together with them will we all meet Jesus upon His return to earth (5:10) and live always with him.

17. What can we learn about Jesus’ coming from 5:1-11? What we learn from this is that no one knows when Jesus will return. Therefore we are to be watchful and prepared. Jesus’ return will result in sudden destruction and wrath for unbelievers and sudden salvation for believers.

Perspective: Paul here wrote information critical for the church to know. It is insightful to realize what he left out, what he did not write about. For instance, he wrote nothing here about the millennium (found only in three verses: Revelation 20:4, 5, 7) nor about a seven year period of tribulation. These things are secondary issues and while important, not something to fall out with each other over.

**** = ask this question before reading the text aloud. This is put people’s minds in gear and them something to look for as the text is read. It causes focus.

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