

The Day of the Lord
1 Thessalonians 5:1-11
Dr. Steve Hereford

INTRODUCTION

1. Please take God's Word and turn to 1 Thessalonians chapter 5.
2. In light of our current study of 1 Peter, I want to address the subject of God's wrath.
3. There is a coming judgment on all unbelievers.
4. Listen as Paul talks about this in verses 1-11.
5. Read 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11.
6. Dr. Arthur Glasser quotes an anonymous rabbi who said, "A time is coming for all men when they will be either born again or wish they had never been born at all" (Reach Out and Grow. Institute for Church Growth, 1974).
7. The rabbi is right.
8. Because the Day of the Lord will be a day "in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up" (2 Peter 3:10).
9. That terrible Day will be the Day when "God will judge the world and punish the nations" (Wiersbe) and a day when God will prepare Israel for the return of Jesus Christ to the earth to establish His kingdom.
10. Jeremiah 30:7 calls the Day of the Lord "the time of Jacob's trouble."

9. This phrase, the Day of the Lord, occurs 23 times in the Bible; 19 times in the OT, 4 times in the NT.
10. Let me remind you further how the Bible describes this Day:
- a) Humbling - Isa.2:12 - “For the day of the Lord of hosts Shall come upon everything proud and lofty, Upon everything lifted up—And it shall be brought low.”
 - b) Destructive - Isa.13:6 - “Wail, for the day of the Lord is at hand! It will come as destruction from the Almighty.”
 - c) An expression of “wrath and fierce anger” - Isa.13:9 - “Behold, the day of the Lord comes, Cruel, with both wrath and fierce anger, To lay the land desolate; And He will destroy its sinners from it.”
 - d) “A day of vengeance” - Jer.46:10 - “For this is the day of the Lord God of hosts, A day of vengeance, That He may avenge Himself on His adversaries. The sword shall devour; It shall be satiated and made drunk with their blood; For the Lord God of hosts has a sacrifice In the north country by the River Euphrates.”
 - e) “The time of the Gentiles” - Ezek.30:3 - “For the day is near, Even the day of the Lord is near; It will be a day of clouds, the time of the Gentiles.”
 - f) Imminent - Joel 2:1 - “Blow the trumpet in Zion, And sound an alarm in My holy mountain! Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble; For the day of the Lord is coming, For it is at hand.”
 - g) “Great and terrible” - Joel 2:11 - “The Lord gives voice before His army, For His camp is very great; For strong is the One who executes His word. For the day of the Lord

is great and very terrible; Who can endure it?"

- h) “Darkness” - Amos 5:20 - “Is not the day of the Lord darkness, and not light? Is it not very dark, with no brightness in it?”
- i) “Recompense for deeds” - Obadiah 1:15 - “For the day of the Lord upon all the nations is near; As you have done, it shall be done to you; Your reprisal shall return upon your own head.”
- j) “Bitter” - Zep.1:14 - “The great day of the Lord is near; It is near and hastens quickly. The noise of the day of the Lord is bitter; There the mighty men shall cry out.”

11. Now as we look at 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11 we see 3 ways in which Paul addresses this Day: *the mention of it* (v.1), *the manifestation of it* (vv.2-8), and *the meaning of it* (vv.9-11).

12. Let's see first *the mention of it* in verse 1.

I. The Mention of the Day of the Lord (v.1)

D. Edmond Hiebert says, “This paragraph is an appropriate companion piece to the preceding. It is the second half of the distinctively eschatological block of material in this epistle. The former offered needed instruction concerning the dead in Christ; this gives a word of needed exhortation to the living” (The Thessalonian Epistles, p.207).

A. The Subject Introduced (v.1a)

1. The transition

“But” Gr.de, transitional, “indicates that a new subject is being introduced” (Hiebert)

2. The subject itself

“But concerning the times and the seasons”

The words for “times” and “seasons” are “synonymous and are on occasion used interchangeably, they are not equivalent terms. Both relate to time” (Hiebert).

“This phrase is found only three times in the Bible, and refers primarily to God’s plans for Israel” (Wiersbe).

- a) In Daniel 2:20-21, Daniel is responding to God’s answer of revealing Nebuchadnezzar’s dream and he says, “Blessed be the name of God forever and ever, for wisdom and might are His, and He changes the times and the seasons; He removes kings and raises up kings; He gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to those who

have understanding.”

- b) In Acts 1:6-7 Luke records a question the apostles asked Jesus. They asked “Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel? And He said to them, ‘It is not for you to know the times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority.’”

3. The meaning of the terms

- a) “Times” Gr.chronos, “expresses simply duration” (Rienecker), “whether a longer or shorter period” (Hiebert)
- b) “Seasons” Gr.kairos, refers “to the characteristics of the period” (Hiebert)

“Both terms are in the plural. The ‘times’ points to the chronological age which may intervene before the parousia takes place; ‘the seasons’ indicates the times in their critical character, the occurrences which will distinguish these times” (Hiebert).

B. The Need Not to Write About This Event (v.1b)

“You have no need that I should write to you”

- 1. Paul had previously instructed the Thessalonians concerning this event

“The mention of the ‘writing’ seems to suggest a contrast to oral teaching. The implication is that the Thessalonians had already received oral teaching on this point” (Hiebert).

2. This phrase also occurs in 4:9 where it refers to the teaching and application of that teaching the Thessalonians had received
3. But concerning *the Day of the Lord*, Paul mentions it again in a fuller treatment in 2 Thessalonians 1-2

That brings us to the second way that Paul recognizes this Day and it covers verses 2-8. Now we see:

II. The Manifestation of the Day of the Lord (vv.2-8)

A. Their Knowledge of It (vv.2-3)

1. They were knowledgeable of this event (v.2)

“For you yourselves know perfectly”

“Know” Gr.oida, “know, understand, perceive” (UBS)

“Perfectly” Gr.akribos, “exactly, accurately” (Strongs), “precisely” (Rienecker). “It implies an exactness of knowledge as the result of careful teaching” (Hiebert)

2. They were knowledgeable of its characteristics (v.2-3)

Paul mentions two characteristics they were apparently familiar with:

- a) A sudden expectant judgment

He refers to it as “a thief in the night”

- (1) Jesus uses this as an illustration of His coming in Matthew 24:42-44

“Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming. But know this, that if the master of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched and not allowed his house to be broken into. Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.”

- (2) Peter also refers to the day of the Lord as coming “as a thief in the night” in 2 Peter 3:10

b) An intense destruction (v.3)

- (1) “Peace and safety”

“Instead of anticipating and preparing for the coming day of judgment, they will be wrapped in a fatal, self-deceiving sense of security” (Hiebert).

John MacArthur says, “Just as false prophets of old fraudulently forecast a bright future, in spite of the imminence of God’s judgment, so they will again in the future days just before the final day of the Lord’s destruction” (The MacArthur Study Bible, p.1849).

God said in Jeremiah 6:14 that “They have also healed the hurt of My people slightly, saying, ‘Peace, peace! When there is no

peace.”

(2) “Sudden destruction”

“Sudden” Gr.aiphnidios, “unexpected, sudden, unforeseen” (Strong’s)

“Destruction” Gr.olethros, “ruin” (Strong’s), “diaster” (Rienecker), “corruption, especially death and that which brings destruction” (Kittel)

Paul says this “comes upon them, as labor pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape.”

Remember that the first 3 seals are referred to in Matthew 24:8 as “the beginning of birth pangs” (NASB).

As each seal in Revelation 6 is opened the events unfold and grow in intensity.

Paul notes their readiness for this event by virtue of their standing before God.

B. Their Readiness for It (vv.4-8)

1. The contrast noted (v.4)

“But you, brethren, are not in darkness”

This is the second time in chapter 5 that he refers to them as “brethren.” And now he “sets the Thessalonian believers in sharp contrast with those mentioned in verse 3, the unthinking and unbelieving

world caught unprepared by the day of judgment” (Hiebert).

a) Believers are not in darkness

That is clear not only here but also in the book of Ephesians and Colossians:

- (1) Paul says in Ephesians 5:8, “For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light.”
- (2) To the Colossians he said in Colossians 1:13 that God “has delivered us from the power of darkness, and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love.’

b) Unbelievers are in darkness

This is simply noted by what we used to be – Paul says, “one darkness” (Eph.5:8). But notice other places where it’s mentioned:

- (1) 2 Cor.6:14 - “Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness?”
- (2) Eph.2:1-3 - “And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, among whom also we all once conducted

ourselves in the lusts of our flesh,
fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the
mind, and were by nature children of
wrath, just as the others.”

2. The positive stated (v.5)

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

D. Edmond Hiebert writes, “The expression ‘sons of light’ is a Hebraic formula describing their nature as belonging to the light. The figure, moreover, expresses an intimate relationship, that they were as closely related to the light as children to parents. The Hebrews described a person as the son of anything which completely dominated and controlled him. Thus the expression means that spiritual light is the prevailing element of their character. Believers are called ‘sons of light,’ not merely because they have received a revelation from God, but because in the new birth, they have received the spiritual capacity for it” (The Thessalonian Epistles, pp.216-217).

1 John 1:5-7 says, “This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.”

3. The charge to preparedness (vv.6-8)

“Therefore” refers back to what has been previously

said. Since we are of the day then “let us not sleep, as others do, but let us watch and be sober” (v.6).

a) Do not sleep as others (v.6)

“Sleep” Gr.katheudo – This is “used metaphorically to denote indifference to spiritual realities on the part of believers. It covers all sorts of moral and spiritual laxity or insensibility” (Hiebert).

James Strong says it refers to “yielding to sloth and sin.”

b) Watch and be sober (vv.6-8)

“But let us watch and be sober” (v.6)

(1) “Watch” Gr.gregoreuo, “to keep awake” (Strong), “to be vigilant” (Rienecker).

“It conveys the demand for morally and spiritually wakeful activity, being on the alert against the assaults of sin and unrighteousness” (Hiebert).

In the same context, Luke records Jesus saying in Luke 21:34-36:

“But take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness, and cares of this life, and that Day come on you unexpectedly. For it will come as a snare on all those who dwell on the face of the whole earth. Watch therefore, and pray always that you

may be counted worthy to escape all these things that will come to pass, and to stand before the Son of Man.”

- (2) “Sober” Gr.nepho, This “expands on the duty of watching. It is not enough just to watch; the watcher must also be sober, rational and self-possessed, in perfect control of all his senses” (Hiebert).

Paul told Timothy in 2 Timothy 4:5, “But you be watchful in all things.”

Peter said in 1 Peter 1:13 to “gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.”

He closes his letter on this subject by saying in 1 Peter 4:7, “But the end of all things is at hand; therefore be serious and watchful in your prayers.”

c) Put on the armor of God (v.8)

- (1) He makes emphasis on the need to be alert by saying again: “But let us who are of the day be sober.”
- (2) And now he shows them how to do this. He says by “putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet the hope of salvation.”

“Putting on” Gr.enduo, “to sink into

(clothing), clothe oneself with” (Strong)

“The believer is not only a watchman but also a warrior. He must not only be alert and self-possessed but also equipped to resist the onslaught of the enemy while awaiting the return of his Lord. The believer must be on his guard, for he waits in a hostile world” (Hiebert).

“The breastplate of faith and love” was a piece of armor that covered the soldier's body from neck to waist and protected his heart, the very center of his life and the spring of his vital forces.

The “helmet as the hope of salvation” gave protection to the head.

This protection for the believer is the “hope of salvation” which is the future end-time deliverance at Christ's coming. It is the antithesis of wrath found in verse 9.

“Hope” Gr. *elpis*, is “favorable and confident expectation” (Vine)

“Plato says the human existence is determined not merely by acceptance of the present and recollection of the past, but also by expectation of the future, either good or bad. Hope are subjective projections of the future...hopes extend beyond the present life, so that one need not fear death” (Kittel).

Romans 8:24-25 says, “For we were saved in this hope, but hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one still hope for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for it with perseverance.”

“Salvation” Gr.soteria, refers “generally of preservation in danger, deliverance from impending death” (Arndt, Gingrich).

III. The Meaning of the Day of the Lord (vv.9-11)

A. The Wrath of God on Unbelievers (vv.9-10)

1. Believers are not appointed to wrath
2. They are appointed to deliverance through Jesus Christ
 - a) 1 Thess.1:9-10
 - b) Rom.8:1 - “There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.”

Paul says to the Thessalonians that “God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, that whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with Him.”

What does the phrase “that whether we wake or sleep” mean?

In 4:13 it referred to death. In 5:6 it refers to spiritual blindness. D.M. Martin asks, “Might katheudo (“to

sleep") signify not unbelievers but Christians who are spiritually dull? Believers should be vigilant and self-controlled. They are to persevere in the Christian life. But what if that vigilance wanes? Does believers' salvation hinge on their own vigilance or on the work of Christ? Paul was assuring his readers here of the security of those for whom Christ died. Human vigilance may flag, but Christ's sacrifice will not fail to deliver the believer from wrath, even believers who have fallen asleep at their post" (The New American Commentary).

3. Unbelievers will experience God's wrath

- a) John 3:18 - "“He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.”"

- b) Zep.1:14-18 - "The great day of the Lord is near; It is near and hastens quickly. The noise of the day of the Lord is bitter; There the mighty men shall cry out. That day is a day of wrath, A day of trouble and distress, A day of devastation and desolation, A day of darkness and gloominess, A day of clouds and thick darkness, A day of trumpet and alarm Against the fortified cities And against the high towers. "I will bring distress upon men, And they shall walk like blind men, Because they have sinned against the Lord; Their blood shall be poured out like dust, And their flesh like refuse." Neither their silver nor their gold Shall be able to deliver them In the day of the Lord's wrath; But the whole land shall be devoured By the fire of His jealousy, For He will make speedy riddance Of all those

who dwell in the land.”

B. The Duty to One Another (v.11)

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

“The passage concludes with an admonition to mutual encouragement and edification similar to that in 4:18. Believers knew of the future judgment. They knew the character of the Christian life they were to live. But knowing and doing are two different things” (D.M. Martin, *The New American Commentary*).

1. Comfort

Gr. Parakaleo, “to call to one’s side.” The RV has “encourage.” Comfort might be better suited to the context and in line with the previous mention of “comfort” in 4:18.

2. Edify

Gr.oikodome, “to build a house,” “to build up”

CONCLUSION

One of two possible destinies awaits every member of the human race. Those who stubbornly remain in spiritual darkness will ultimately "be cast out into the outer darkness" of eternal hell (Matt. 8:12; cf. 22:13; 25:30). But those who through faith in Jesus Christ come to the light of salvation (Acts 13:47; cf. John 8:12; 9:5; 11:9; 12:46) will "share in the inheritance of the saints in Light" (Col. 1:12). They will live forever in God's glorious presence, where "there will no longer be any night; and they will

not have need of the light of a lamp nor the light of the sun,
because the Lord God will illumine them; and they will reign
forever and ever" (Rev. 22:5).