

The Second Coming in Thessalonians #4: The Day of the LORD

Probably the most consistent theme of the two books of Thessalonians is the second coming of Christ. So far we have looked at 1 Thess. 1:10, 2:19, 3:12-13, and 4:13-18.

1 Thess. 5:1-6 – “But of the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you. For yourselves know perfectly that **the day of the Lord** so cometh as a thief in the night. For when they shall say, Peace and safety: then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape. But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief. Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness. Therefore let us not sleep, as do others: but let us watch and be sober.”

“Of the times and the seasons” – Jesus’ disciples wanted to know “When shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?” (Mt. 24:3) Then before he ascended to heaven, they wondered “Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?” It is natural for us as Christians, since we know Christ will return, to want to know when all these things will occur. Paul here reminds them that we will not know the exact time, but then gives some hints.

- The return will come “as a thief in the night”. That is, unexpectedly. The thief will wait until he is confident that no one is waiting up for him, or on guard. This thief analogy is repeated many times through the NT, from the gospels to Revelation.
- When the world is breathing a sigh of relief that all seems finally to be in peace and safety, the day of the Lord will come as a destruction.
- It will be unavoidable, as a woman whose delivery has started. Escape will be impossible.
- The world is in darkness and has no idea of Christ’s imminent return, but for us as believers, there should be no big surprise. We do not know the exact time any more than anyone else, but we do know that it is coming, and should therefore be ready and watching, with our eyes open, and not be caught sleeping.
- So the warning to us is to watch and be sober.

The Day of the LORD

Besides the above points, which are the most obvious things we get from reading the passage, it contains a curious phrase, “the day of the Lord”. What does that mean? It is a phrase used repeatedly through the OT prophets, referring to a day of vengeance against God’s enemies, of his fury being poured out upon the world and specifically upon Israel’s enemies who would be trying to destroy her.

The “day” of the LORD does not refer to a 24 hour period, but to all the events occurring at the end of the age. We might similarly use the word, as in “back in my day”, or “I dream of a day when ...”, etc. Some examples of “day” being used generally, and not just for 24 hours, are in

Zeph. 3:16 – speaks of a time when “the king of Israel, even the LORD, is in the midst of thee: thou shalt not see evil any more. In “that day” it shall be said to Jerusalem, Fear thou not ...”

Zech. 2:11 also speaks of a time when the Lord dwells in the midst of his people, “And many nations shall be joined to the LORD in “that day”, and shall be my people”.

So “the day of the LORD” is not just a single solar day, but is used to describe the time of the end. It includes the second coming, all the cataclysmic events and judgments through the book of Revelation, the destruction of the world in final judgment, the restoration of the world in the millennium, and the reign of Christ as God himself in Jerusalem, with all nations living in peace and coming to Zion to be taught and to worship the King.

The actual phrase “the day of the LORD” is probably the most common, but there are synonymous terms as “the day of vengeance”, “the day of the LORD’s anger”, “the great and terrible day of the LORD”, “the day of the LORD’s wrath”, or simply “that day” used in the context of great and universal judgments.

There are also other phrases that occur in context to be describing the same thing, as “the indignation of the LORD”, “the year of recompenses”, “the year of my redeemed”, “the time of Jacob’s trouble”, etc.

Let us look at some examples:

Isa. 2:10-12 – “Enter into the rock, and hide thee in the dust, for fear of the LORD, and for the glory of his majesty. The lofty looks of man shall be humbled, and the haughtiness of men shall be bowed down, and the LORD alone shall be exalted in that day. For the day of the LORD of hosts shall be upon every one that is proud and lofty, and upon every one that is lifted up: and he shall be brought low.”

Isa. 2:17-21 – “And the loftiness of man shall be bowed down, and the haughtiness of men shall be made low; and the LORD alone shall be exalted in that day. And the idols shall he utterly abolish. And they shall go into the holes of the rocks, and into the caves of the earth, for fear of the LORD, and for the glory of his majesty, when he ariseth to shake terribly the earth. In that day a man shall cast his idols of silver, and his idols of gold, which they made each one for himself to worship, to the moles and to the bats; To go into the clefts of the rocks, and into the tops of the rugged rocks, for fear of the LORD, and for the glory of his majesty, when he ariseth to shake terribly the earth.”

Isa. 34:2-8 – “For the indignation of the LORD is upon all nations, and his fury upon all their armies ...all the host of heaven shall be dissolved, and the heavens shall be rolled together as a scroll: and all their host shall fall down, as the leaf falleth off from the vine, and as a falling fig from the fig tree. ... The sword of the LORD is filled with blood, ... for the LORD hath a sacrifice in Bozrah, and a great slaughter in the land of Idumea. ... For it is the day of the LORD's vengeance, and the year of recompences for the controversy of Zion.”

Isa. 63:1-6 – “...For the day of vengeance is in mine heart, and the year of my redeemed is come ...”

Ezek. 30:3 – “For the day is near, even the day of the LORD is near, a cloudy day; it shall be the time of the heathen.”

Joel 1:15 – “Alas for the day! for the day of the LORD is at hand, and as a destruction from the Almighty shall it come.”

Joel 2:1-2 – “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 cometh, for it is nigh at hand; A day of darkness and of gloominess, a day of clouds and of thick darkness, as the morning spread upon the mountains: a great people and a strong; there hath not been ever the like, neither shall be any more after it, even to the years of many generations.”

Joel 2:10-11 – “The earth shall quake before them; the heavens shall tremble: the sun and the moon shall be dark, and the stars shall withdraw their shining: And the LORD shall utter his voice before his army: for his camp is very great: for he is strong that executeth his word: for the day of the LORD is great and very terrible; and who can abide it?”

Joel 2:30-31 – “And I will shew wonders in the heavens and in the earth, blood, and fire, and pillars of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the great and terrible day of the LORD come.”

Joel 3:13-16 – “Put ye in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe: come, get you down; for the press is full, the fats overflow; for their wickedness is great. Multitudes, multitudes in the valley of decision: for the day of the LORD is near in the valley of decision. The sun and the moon shall be darkened, and the stars shall withdraw their shining. The LORD also shall roar out of Zion, and utter his voice from Jerusalem; and the heavens and the earth shall shake: but the LORD will be the hope of his people, and the strength of the children of Israel.”

Amos 5:18-20 – “Woe unto you that desire the day of the LORD! to what end is it for you? the day of the LORD is darkness, and not light. As if a man did flee from a lion, and a bear met him; or went into the house, and leaned his hand on the wall, and a serpent bit him. Shall not the day of the LORD be darkness, and not light? even very dark, and no lightness in it?”

Obad. 15 – “For the day of the LORD is near upon all the heathen; as thou hast done, it shall be done unto thee: thy reward shall return upon thine own head.”

Zeph. 1:7 – “Hold thy peace at the presence of the LORD God: for the day of the LORD is at hand: for the LORD hath prepared a sacrifice, he hath bid his guests.”

Zeph. 1:14-18 – “The great day of the LORD is near, it is near, and hasteth greatly, even the voice of the day of the LORD: the mighty man shall cry there bitterly. That day is a day of wrath, a day of trouble and distress,

a day of wasteness and desolation, a day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness. A day of the trumpet and alarm against the fenced cities, and against the high towers. And I will bring distress upon men, that they shall walk like blind men, because they have sinned against the LORD: and their blood shall be poured out as dust, and their flesh as dung. 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 shall make even a speedy riddance of all them that dwell in the land."

Zeph. 2:1-3 – "Gather yourselves together, yea, gather together, O nation not desired; Before the decree bring forth, before the day pass as the chaff, before the fierce anger of the LORD come upon you, before the day of the LORD's anger come upon you. Seek ye the LORD, all ye meek of the earth, which have wrought his judgment: seek righteousness, seek meekness: it may be ye shall be hid in the day of the LORD's anger."

Zech. 14:1-9 – "Behold, the day of the LORD cometh, and thy spoil shall be divided in the midst of thee. For I will gather all nations against Jerusalem to battle; and the city shall be taken, and the houses rifled, and the women ravished; and half of the city shall go forth into captivity, and the residue of the people shall not be cut off from the city. Then shall the LORD go forth, and fight against those nations, as when he fought in the day of battle. And his feet shall stand in that day upon the mount of Olives, which is before Jerusalem on the east, and the mount of Olives shall cleave in the midst thereof toward the east and toward the west, and there shall be a very great valley; and half of the mountain shall remove toward the north, and half of it toward the south. And ye shall flee to the valley of the mountains ... and the LORD my God shall come, and all the saints with thee. And it shall come to pass in that day, that the light shall not be clear, nor dark: But it shall be one day which shall be known to the LORD, not day, nor night: but it shall come to pass, that at evening time it shall be light. And it shall be in that day, that living waters shall go out from Jerusalem; half of them toward the former sea, and half of them toward the hinder sea: in summer and in winter shall it be. And the LORD shall be king over all the earth: in that day shall there be one LORD, and his name one."

So when 1 Thess. 5:2 refers to "the day of the LORD", it is not some new or accidental phrase that Paul came up with. He uses it in the same meaning as all those OT prophecies. The book of Revelation also agrees with these descriptions of judgment, and gives more details.

In conclusion, the day of the LORD refers to the time when

- God's patient longsuffering of rampant sin comes to an end, like it did in the days of Noah.
- Man's pride, loftiness, and haughtiness is brought low.
- Idols are abolished.
- Men tremble in fear and try to hide from God.
- He shakes the earth and the heavens.
- He exercises horrible and bloody judgment on the nations of the heathen in vengeance for their sins against Israel.
- It is a time of great darkness and destruction.
- Sun, moon and stars will be darkened and the stars will fall, and there will be great signs of blood, fire, and pillars of smoke.
- It is a judgment greater than anything that has happened before.
- It is described as a harvest, because the wickedness of men is so great.
- It is also described as "the LORD's sacrifice".
- The LORD's voice goes forth as a roar that shakes the earth.
- It is unavoidable. There is nowhere that wicked men can go to escape the judgments of that day. They will be utterly confounded.
- It encompasses the Tribulation period, the second coming of Christ and the destruction of the armies that were trying to destroy Israel and Jerusalem, and the following period (the Millennium) when Christ is reigning out of Jerusalem as the King of all the earth, and the river of living waters going out from the throne to water the earth..

Yet despite all the judgments, there is hope for God's people, that for them it is a day of deliverance, with God as their hope and strength. In fact he gives us a way out – that before the fierce day of his anger comes, we should seek righteousness and meekness, so that we may be hid in the day of his anger. We should believe that as God preserved Noah with the ark, that he will also preserve his righteous sons from the great judgments to come, by the rapture. As he said to the church at Philadelphia (Rev. 3:10-11),

“Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth. Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown.”

Sunday school teaching notes are available at: <https://hnslack.wixsite.com/mysite>