

### A Description and Some Details of the Day of the Lord 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11

1 Thessalonians 5:1-11 - *“But concerning the times and the seasons, brethren, you have no need that I should write to you. <sup>2</sup> For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night. <sup>3</sup> For when they say, “Peace and safety!” then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labor pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape. <sup>4</sup> But you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this day should overtake you as a thief. <sup>5</sup> You are all sons of light and sons of the day. We are not of the night nor of darkness.*

*<sup>6</sup> Therefore let us not sleep, as others do, but let us watch and be sober. <sup>7</sup> For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk are drunk at night. <sup>8</sup> But let us who are of the day be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet the hope of salvation. <sup>9</sup> For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>10</sup> who died for us, that whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with Him. <sup>11</sup> Therefore comfort each other and edify one another, just as you also are doing.”*

#### Background Notes

The apostle Paul introduced a new subject in 1 Thessalonians 5. There were no chapter divisions in the original letter, but this chapter break comes at a good place because a new topic, the Day of the Lord, was introduced. Although the Day of the Lord is related to the Rapture because it is related to the future return of the Lord to this earth, it is not the same as the Rapture. The Rapture of the Church is a distinct event that precedes the Day of the Lord.

The doctrine of the Rapture of the Church was revealed to the apostle Paul: *“For this we say to you by the word of the Lord” (4:15)*. That’s why the Rapture is called a *mystery* in 1 Corinthians 15:51. *“Behold I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed.”* In the New Testament, a *mystery* was not something strange or mysterious – rather it was doctrine that was concealed in the Old Testament and was revealed in the New Testament. So that’s why the Rapture is described as a *mystery*.

However, the Day of the Lord is **never** called a *mystery*. The Day of the Lord was a well-known doctrine that was frequently predicted in the pages of Old Testament Scripture. That’s one reason why the apostle Paul wrote: *“But concerning the times and the seasons, brethren, you have no need that I should write to you. For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night” (v1-2)*.

And before His ascension the Lord Jesus told His disciples: *“It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority” (Acts 1:7)*. In other words, since the Church will be leaving at the Rapture, you don’t have to

be concerned about the details of the Day of the Lord, as if it's going to overtake believers. So I think you can follow the apostle Paul's thinking as he moved from the doctrine of the Rapture to the doctrine of the Day of the Lord.

As we examine the Old Testament prophetic texts about the Day of the Lord, we find that the prophets all looked forward to a Day of the Lord in the End Times. Although there have been precursors to this future Day of the Lord in history, the **ultimate** Day of the Lord is still in the future. As we further study the Old Testament prophecies, and also our Lord's Olivet Discourse about future events, we see that this future Day of the Lord will include a time of great tribulation before the Lord returns to this earth. We also see that there will be a great time of blessing after the Lord returns and judges the nations. All these events are part of the Day of the Lord.

Listen to the way our Lord puts it in Matthew 24:29-30, *"Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory."* The segment of the Day of the Lord before His return in glory to this earth is called the Tribulation. The segment of the Day of the Lord after His return to this earth in glory is called the Millennium, because Revelation 20 says that the Lord's earthly kingdom will last for a thousand years.

We believe that the Rapture will precede the Day of the Lord – it will precede both the Tribulation part and the millennial Kingdom part of the Day of the Lord. We believe this is exactly what the apostle Paul taught here in 1 Thessalonians 5.

## Doctrinal Points

### 1. The Day of the Lord will not come "like a thief in the night" for Christians.

Verses 2-5: *"For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night. For when they say, 'Peace and safety!' then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labor pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape. But you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this day should overtake you as a thief. You are all sons of light and sons of the day. We are not of the night nor of darkness."*

Verses 2-5 deal with the tribulation and judgment aspect of the Day of the Lord. When the Lord returns to this earth, He will return in judgment. Read the Olivet Discourse in this connection (Matthew 24-25, Mark 13, or Luke 21). It's only after the judgment of unbelievers who will be living in that day that the blessing of our Lord's kingdom on earth can take place.

Notice the contrast between the unbelievers who will be judged at that time and the Thessalonian believers. The unbelievers are of the night and of darkness, and they foolishly say, "Everything is fine! *"Peace and safety!"* But sudden destruction will overtake them, like a thief coming in the night.

But you're not like that, Thessalonian believers! And that certainly applies to Christians today as well. We are sons of light – we are sons of the day. We are not of the night or of darkness. We will not be overtaken by the sudden judgment of the Day of the Lord because we are sons of the day. We will not be here for that night of judgment.

In chapter 4 Paul explained that believers will not be here for the judgment because of the doctrine of the Rapture of the Church. True believers will not be here on this earth when the tribulation judgments of the Day of the Lord take place. Believers will be here for the kingdom and its blessings, however, because we will return with the Lord when He comes back to this earth. *“For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus” (4:14).*

We can only return with the Lord when He comes to this earth after the Tribulation if we have **not** been here during the Tribulation. Matthew 24:29 says that the Lord will come back in power and glory to this earth after the Tribulation. 1 Thessalonians 4:14 (and other passages) says that we will come back with Him when He comes back after the Tribulation. And if we come back with Him, we cannot be here during the Tribulation. The logic is simple. The Day of the Lord will **not** come like a thief in the night for believers.

## **2. The day of the Lord will not be a day of wrath for Christians.**

1 Thessalonians 1:10 said that believers are to *“wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.”* When we discussed chapter 1 we mentioned that this verse implied the **imminent return** of Christ for His Church – the fact that He could come at any time. We also mentioned that the true believers would be delivered from **all wrath** in the future - not only from the wrath of hell, but **all wrath**. That would include the judgment wrath of the seven-year Tribulation period that will come upon this earth during the future Day of the Lord.

In chapter 5 this same truth is again taught. Verse 9: *“For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.”* The context of this chapter is the tribulation and judgment of the Day of the Lord, when sudden destruction shall come upon unbelievers. Not one of them will escape the wrath of God (v3). But God has not destined believers to suffer this wrath (v9). The “package of salvation” for believers not only includes salvation from the wrath of God in hell, but salvation from **all wrath** of God, including the future Tribulation period.

Make no mistake about it, the coming Tribulation period will not be just some “hard times” on this earth. No! The judgment wrath of God will be poured out upon this earth! About the Tribulation period, Revelation 16:1 says: *“Then I heard a loud voice from the temple saying to the seven angels, “Go and pour out the bowls of the wrath of God on the earth.”*

But true Christians - the Church - will be delivered from **all wrath** of God. The Day of the Lord will be a day of wrath - but not for Christians.

## Practical Application

### Let's stay awake - and be watching!

*"Therefore let us not sleep, as others do, but let us watch and be sober" (v6).*

What are we to watch for? When studying Scripture, always remember to look at the **overall context!** Look for the overall theme of the chapter or the passage in which a verse is located! The context for verse 6 is **the return of the Lord** – and this context begins with 1 Thessalonians 4:13, and moves right on into chapter 5. In other words, Paul was teaching that because we Christians are sons of light and will not face the judgments of the Day of the Lord, but rather will be "raptured" home to Heaven before that time - we should be eagerly watching for the Lord to come and "catch us up" to be with Him forever. It could occur at any time!

Are you watching? It's easy to get spiritually drowsy, and even fall asleep. And we're vulnerable to attack if we're not alert and watching. 1 Peter 5:8 warns us: *"Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour."* That's why we need to put on the full armor of God (v8). So let's stay awake and watchful. And part of staying awake is helping, encouraging and edifying fellow believers, so that they will stay alert as well (v11).

For those of us who may have become complacent, and are forgetting to watch for the Lord's return, verse 10 is an encouraging verse. The Lord Jesus *"died for us, that whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with Him."* The words for "wake or sleep" in verse 10 are the same words that are used for "watch" or "sleep" in verse 6. (And by the way, the word for "sleep" in chapter 5 is a different Greek word than the word used for "sleep" in chapter 4, where the word "sleep" means death.)

Verse 10 is saying that all believers will not go through the wrath of the Day of the Lord - whether or not they are watching for the Lord's return. There's no such thing as a "partial Rapture" – the idea that only the believers who are actively watching and waiting will go with the Lord when He returns. But remember - the Lord expects us to be alert and to watch for His coming: *"Blessed are those servants whom the master finds awake when he comes" (Luke 12:37).*

Verse 10 is a good supporting verse for the pre-Tribulation Rapture position. All true Christians, spiritual and carnal, will take part in the Rapture - but how much better it will be if we are awake and looking forward eagerly to His return!

So - let's stay awake - and be watching!