

Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth One Verse at a Time*

The Day of the Lord, Part 1

Scripture: 1 Thessalonians 5:1-2

Code: 52-19

This morning we return to our study of 1 Thessalonians. And I would encourage you to open your Bible, if you would, to chapter 5...1 Thessalonians chapter 5, we now begin the last chapter in this wonderful epistle which has so blessed and encouraged our hearts for many months. And as we come to chapter 5 we're going, this morning, to begin to examine the first three verses. Let me read them to you. "Now as to the times and the epochs, brethren, you have no need of anything to be written to you, for you yourselves know full well that the day of the Lord will come just like a thief in the night. While they are saying peace and safety, then destruction will come upon them suddenly like birth pangs upon a woman with child and they shall not escape."

One of the most frightening truths in all of Scripture surrounds the event that is identified in verse 2 as the day of the Lord. That term is a technical term in the Scripture to describe the day when Jesus comes back to bring the flaming fury and anger of God on all the sinners of the world. It is a day of devastation. It is a day of destruction. It is a day of doom. It is a day of damnation.

Paul here reminds us of this significant important climactic cataclysmic day to come in human history. Frankly, it is not at all popular to talk about God's fury. It is not popular to talk about God's anger, God's vengeance. In fact, seldom do you hear a sermon on the day of the Lord, on the time when Jesus comes back to judge those who have rejected Him. Everything today needs to be positive and affirming and comforting. And very few preachers really want to deal with this particular topic. Rarely does someone preach on the vengeance of God.

But to ignore such a truth would be to be unfaithful, to teach and preach the whole counsel of God. And the Bible, Old Testament and New Testament, front to back is loaded with warnings about the judgment of God, eternal punishment on unbelievers, damnation, retribution, vengeance, wrath, anger, fury. And, in fact, the prophets had much to say about it, the Apostles had much to say about it. But the one who had the most to say about it was Jesus Himself. And so, we have the prophets and the Apostles and even our Lord Jesus as examples of the pattern that all true preachers must follow, and that is to warn men about the day of the Lord.

Now as we approach the passage you will remember that Paul has just completed explaining the Rapture of the church. In chapter 4 verses 13 through 18 he described the nature and character of the catching away of the church, to meet the Lord Jesus in the air and to go to heaven to dwell in the places that He is preparing for them there. And so, chapter 4 ends with the statement, "Therefore

comfort one another with these words." There's great comfort, there's great joy and there's great hope, there's great confidence, there's great assurance and affirmation in anticipating the Rapture when the Lord Jesus comes and takes us off this Earth to heaven to dwell with Him in the Father's house. From the blessed event of the catching away of the church to be with the Lord, Paul now turns to the horrible event that follows it, the destruction of the wicked. All those who are on Earth who reject Christ and reject God will feel the fury of God in the day of the Lord.

Now again as we noted in chapter 4, Paul's purpose here is not so much theological and eschatological as it is pastoral. Obviously among the Thessalonian believers they were troubled by some of these issues. The first thing that troubled them was they thought Jesus would come and get them while they were still living. They thought the Rapture would come in their life time. And some Christians were dying and Jesus hadn't arrived yet. And so their question was, what happens to believers who die, do they miss the Rapture? And so Paul wrote, as we noted in chapter 4, no, the dead in Christ will rise first and then we'll join them so we'll all be there, don't worry about those who die, be comforted with this truth.

But it was also a curiosity on their minds as to when the end was going to come. When was this Rapture and when was the day of the Lord to come when God poured out His fury on all the Earth? And by the way, they knew about the day of the Lord. In 2 Thessalonians 2:5 Paul says, "I was telling you about it when I was with you." So they had information about the day of the Lord, and now they have information about the Rapture. The church is going to be caught away and they already know the world is going to feel the fury of God's final vengeance in a cataclysmic holocaust of judgment, the likes of which the world has never seen or even conceived. They knew it was coming but their question was...when is it going to happen? And so in verse 1 Paul says, "Now as to the times and the epochs..."

First of all, they wondered about the believers who died. And now since people were dying they wondered...well, when is it going to happen? How long are we going to wait for this? Will it or won't it happen in our life time? And so Paul in wanting to answer the queries that no doubt they have raised to Timothy who has visited them and now as chapter 3 verse 6 says is come back to Paul to tell Paul what concerns them, he wants to speak regarding the day of the Lord in answer to their concern. So we could say that he moves from teaching the Rapture which takes the church out of the world to heaven to talking about the day of the Lord which calls for the judgment of God on the ungodly in the world. His discussion of the Rapture was to encourage and comfort the Christians. And you will notice down in verse 11 please, that even his discussion of the day of the Lord is to encourage and build up the Christians. So his purposes are pastoral. He wants these things to have an impact on their life.

Now as he discusses this day of the Lord judgment there are three things that I want you to notice...its coming, its character and its completeness. For now we will simply look at that first point,

its coming. But before we do that, let's introduce it by an examination of verse 1. Follow along. "Now as to the times and the epochs, brethren, you have no need of anything to be written to you."

Just a note of interest. Those first little words "now as to" could be translated "but concerning" but they translate two little Greek words peri de(??). Any student of the Greek New Testament will recognize that peri deis a familiar little phrase. It occurs in the writing of the Apostle Paul very often when he changes the subject. He is now moving to another subject. In chapter 4 and verse 9 he used it when he turned from one subject to another one. In chapter 4 verse 13 in the Greek text he uses it, turning from the discussion in 9 to 12 to another subject in verse 13. Now he uses it again here as he turns to another theme. He has talked about the Rapture and now he is discussing the day of the Lord, a different event.

By the way, if you were to take a Greek New Testament and go through 1 Corinthians, for example, you would become very familiar with the use of this little phrase. I think you find it in chapter 7 verse 1 and 25, chapter 8 verse 1, chapter 12 verse 1, chapter 16 verse 1, as a way in which he changes the subject. And so again we note here the word "brethren." Very often that kind of address is a fresh call to attention and a fresh call to attention is a call to a new subject, a new thought and a new idea. So both the use of peri de and the use of brethren are elements used in introducing a new line of discourse. We note even the use of that word brethren in verse 13 and that word brethren back in verse 9 and that word brethren back in verse 1. So he seemingly sort of moves from theme to theme in this discussion, noting the word brethren as a fresh call to attention. Here we can say that while he's talking about the general scenario of the end time, he moves from one event which is the Rapture of the church to another which is the day of the Lord, judgment on the ungodly. Both events have implications for the church and for believers, as we note as he calls them to encouragement and edification at the end of this section.

Now as we look at this we need to understand just a very very simple background. And that is this, the Thessalonian believers were curious about when all of these end time things were going to happen. That is not a curiosity hard for us to identify with, is it? That has been a curiosity through all the history of the church and is nonetheless a curiosity that is never satisfied. It is still yet a curiosity even today, when will it happen? First we're wondering why are these people dying if Jesus is coming, why doesn't He let them live till He gets here? Second, if He keeps delaying His coming, when is it going to happen? When is He going to arrive? And so they wanted to know. And they wanted to know the times and the epochs. Very interesting phrase, fascinating phrase.

It had become, I guess, a technical phrase for the Second Coming. It's used in Acts 1:7 where our Lord says it is not for you to know the times and the epochs. The Greek is the chronos and the kairos. Two different kinds of time. I suppose they could be used interchangeably, they could be overlapping. They could be here referring in a very general sense just to the time of the end. But if we're to separate the two words, chronos is the word from which we get chronology. It simply means

clock time, or calendar time, chronological time. Kairos means seasons, epochs, events. It looks at time, not from the viewpoint of a day and an hour, it looks at time from the viewpoint of an event, of an epoch, of something that happened. We talk about the times of the Gentiles. We talk about modern times. We mean by that that this period of history is characterized by certain events. And so they're curious about the timing in terms of chronology, they're curious about the events of the end, the time period and the epochs that mark the end.

And by the way, I would just note to you that the use of the plurals here "as to the times and the epochs" indicates the plurality of chronological times and the plurality of significant events that make up the end. For example, just think of the various times from a chronological viewpoint. You have at the end of the age a time period called the seventieth week of Daniel. Very clearly in Daniel 9 he says there is prophesied upon the nation Israel a final seven-year period where God will sum up His work with Israel, that's the seven-year period we know as the seventieth week of Daniel. There is also a period called the Great Tribulation designated as three and a half years, 1260 days. It is also called "times, time and half a time." And there is another time period added to that by Daniel, 1290 days, which adds 30 more days. And then Daniel refers to 1335 days. And then there is the one thousand year millennial kingdom mentioned in the book of Revelation. So you have the time of Daniel's seventieth week, the time of the Great Tribulation. You have the time of the millennial kingdom. You have...those are different times, different chronologies in which certain epochs and events will take place.

Then you have a number of events. You have the Rapture of the church. You have the rise of the Antichrist. You have the salvation of the nation Israel. You have a series of judgments that come through natural means. And then you have a series of judgments that come through supernatural means. You have the return of Jesus Christ. You have the battle of Armageddon, the destruction of the world's nations. You have the judgment of the sheep and the goats. You have the establishment of the millennial kingdom. You have the binding of Satan as loosing the world-wide rebellion, the destruction of the world and then the creation of the new heaven and the new earth. Many times and many epochs make up the end.

And in their curiosity they want to know when is this all going to happen. Can you tell us about it? And that's the level of their curiosity. They feared, I suppose, that they might not be spiritually ready when the Lord returned and they miss the Rapture. And maybe they thought there was something that they needed to do in anticipation of these things to be sure they didn't miss the Rapture and end up in the day of the Lord. They didn't want to get caught. Paul says to them, however, in verse 4, "Brethren, you're not in darkness that the day should overtake you like a thief." You don't belong to the day of the Lord. That's not for you. You're not in darkness, you're children of light, you don't belong in the day of the Lord, you belong in the Rapture not the day of the Lord. But at this point they probably had some fears and some questions and were wondering. It isn't long apparently until someone comes and says that they're in the day of the Lord. And they're starting to feel some

persecution and some hostility and animosity and they're told by somebody, as 2 Thessalonians 2 says, that they're in the day of the Lord. And Paul has to say...No, no, no, you're not in the day of the Lord, you know what I told you about the day of the Lord, you know it can't come until Antichrist is known, you know it can't come until he abominates the temple with a sacrifice, you're not in the day of the Lord.

Well that indicates to us that the persecution and hostility coming against them made them fearful that maybe they had...maybe they were going to miss the Rapture and they were in the day of the Lord. So they had the confusion of these things in their minds and they wanted to know, one, what happens to the people who die and in chapter 4 he says, no, they'll be there at the Rapture, too. When is it going to happen? Is it now? Is it later? Are we in it? And he says to them, "As to the times and the epochs, brethren," look at this, "you have no need of anything to be written to you." You don't need anything written to you. He used that same phrase in chapter 4 verse 9. As to the love of the brethren, you have no need for anyone to write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God. It's almost the same as he says here. You have no need of anything to be written to you for you yourselves know full well. You don't need anymore information. You already have all the information you need about that.

You say, "Now wait a minute. You mean, we have all the information we need about the coming judgment, about the coming of Christ, about the day of the Lord? We don't know when it's going to happen. We'd like to know all of the chronologies and all of the epochs, we need to know all of that." He says you don't need to know any of that. You don't need to know that. You know all you need to know. By the way, they're not alone in this. The disciples had the same curiosity. In fact, their curiosity kicked off the Olivet Discourse in Matthew 24 when the disciples came to Jesus privately and said, "Tell us, when will these things be and what will be the sign of Your coming and the end of the age." And then in Acts 1:6 they say, "Lord, is it this time that You're going to start Your Kingdom?" They had the same curiosity about timing details. How long do we have to wait? When will the Lord arrive?

Now listen carefully. Paul's response is that spiritual preparedness for the coming of Christ does not involve date setting, clock watching, or sign seeking. Not for the believers. He says you don't have any need of anything to be written to you. You're not going to be there. Verse 9, "God hasn't destined you for wrath," on an eternal level, and God in verse 4 he says hasn't even destined you for the day of the Lord. Paul's point is you already know everything you need to know and everything God has told you. In chapter 5 of 2 Thessalonians 2 he says basically that same thing, he says, "Do you not remember that I...while I was still with you I was telling you these things?"

Beloved, your spiritual preparedness for the coming of Christ is not related to date setting, clock watching and sign seeking. You don't need to know those things. Now on the issues they needed knowledge, he gave it. Chapter 4 verse 13 to 18, they needed to understand about the Rapture, the

character and nature of the Rapture and he explained it. Didn't tell them the time of it. Nowhere in the Bible do we know the time of it. And when it comes to the day of the Lord, and all the events surrounding that and all of the things of the end, all the times and epochs, he says you don't need to know that. I will tell you what you need know, need to know and can know, that's not something you need to know. Furthermore, you can't know it anyway.

In Matthew 24 Jesus Himself makes a really astounding statement, 24:36, "But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven nor the Son, but the Father alone." Nobody knows, not men, not angels, not the incarnate Son of God in His self-limitation. He doesn't even know, He says. In Mark's gospel chapter 13 and verse 32, "But of that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven nor the Son but the Father alone. Take heed, keep on the alert for you do not know when the appointed time is." You can't know that. No one knows that. Acts 1:7, "It is not given for you to know the times and the seasons, brethren, which the Father has put in His own power." It's not for you to know that. We don't need to know that. Knowing that would be counter-productive, wouldn't it? If we knew when Jesus was going to come and Rapture His church and when He was going to come in the day of the Lord judgment, if we knew the precise moment of all of that it could make us spiritually indifferent if we were a long way away...or put us in a position of some kind of panic if it were near. God has chosen not to reveal the time of the final epochs so that all believers live in anticipation expectancy all the time.

So he says you don't need to know that. He says you already know full well what you need to know. What's that? "That the day of the Lord will come just like a thief in the night." Now that leads us to point number one in our outline, its coming...its coming. He's going to tell us about its coming, and he's going to tell us what really we already know.

What he's saying here is the one thing you need to know is it's going to happen when nobody...what?...expects it. It's going to happen when nobody expects it. It's that unexpectedness that concerns him. They were curious about times and seasons so he launches into a response and says the only thing you need to know is that the day of the Lord will come when you don't expect it, when the people alive at that time don't expect it. And then he moves from that into a section on exhortation to holy living in the light of that reality.

But let's look at verse 2 in more detail. "For you yourselves know full well." That "full well" there, akribos, means you know exactly. It's a word that comes out of research. It points to painstaking research to come to a conclusion. You know perfectly, you know exactly, you know accurately that it's to be unexpected. I've told you that. And we know already from this epistle back in chapter 1 verse 10 that the whole church was waiting for...for Christ to come from heaven. In chapter 2 verse 19 he reminds them of the Lord Jesus coming. Chapter 3 verse 13 again reminds them of the coming of the Lord Jesus. Chapter 4 discusses the Rapture. And never does he tell them when...never. He doesn't tell them that. And the reason he doesn't tell them that is because you can't know that.

Let's go back to Matthew 24. Would you go back there with me for a moment? You're going to have to have your Bible handy because we're going to jump around a bit, but this is very essential. In Matthew chapter 24 and verse 36, Jesus has been talking about the time of the end, talking about His Second Coming and when He comes in terrifying judgment and also when He comes to gather the elect from the four corners of the world. He talks about the fact that heaven and earth are going to pass away in verse 35, and all of this in the end time. But verse 36, He says, "The day and the hour no one knows, the angels in heaven don't know it, the Son on earth doesn't know it, only the Father knows it." So this is...this is the major secret here, folks. The time we don't know. And then He describes the most interesting conditions. Verse 37, "The coming of the Son of Man will be just like the days of Noah, for as in those days which were before the flood, they were eating and drinking, they were marrying and giving in marriage until the day that Noah entered the ark." What does that mean? They were utterly indifferent to 120 years of Noah doing what? Warning, preaching righteousness, warning them. And they were indifferent to it. And they were indifferent right until he got in the thing. And they still were indifferent until the flood came and took them all away. So the coming of the Son of Man will be, it will be to the generation that is alive when it happens unexpected...unexpected.

That's amazing. Because He has just described, starting in verse 4, all kinds of things that people living at that time could look for. He says, verse 6, "There will be wars and rumors of wars, and there will be nation rising against nation, kingdom against kingdom, there will be famines, there will be earthquakes." He goes on down to talk about false prophets leading people astray. He talks about the abomination of desolations spoken of by Daniel the prophet when they desecrate the temple. Talks about terrible tribulation, verse 21, such as not occurred since the beginning of the world until now. And all of this stuff is going on in the world and they still are going on, life as usual, marry, given marriage, eat, drink, just live your life until the time comes and they're swept away. And it's going to come quick. They're going to be doing business as usual, verse 40, two guys are working in a field, one is taken, one is left. Two women grinding at the mill, one's taken, one's left. It's going to happen when people are just doing the normal duties of life. And He says, verse 42, "Therefore be on the alert, for you don't know which day your Lord is coming, but be sure of this, if the head of house had known at what time of the night the thief was coming he would have been on the alert and would not have allowed his house to be broken into, for this reason you be ready, too, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour when you do not think He will."

Jesus said this to a crowd of people who would never experience this. They're already dead and this hasn't happened yet. But He put every generation on notice that they had to live in expectation, right? Because only God the Father knows when it's going to happen. And His point is it's going to be sudden, it's going to be unexpected. Back in verse 27 of Matthew 24, it's going to be like lightning flashing from the east to the west. Just a flash of lightning and the Son of Man will be here in a time when people don't think it's going to happen.

So, the day of the Lord comes like a thief in the night. And we can thank our Lord Jesus for that analogy. He is not a thief but the day of the Lord comes like a thief. He's the one that said it right there in verse 43, if the head of the house had known at what time the night the thief was coming, he would have been on the alert. The day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. Beyond that, he says, you don't need to know anything about timing. You don't need to know anything about dates. And, of course, because you're the redeemed, you're going in the Rapture, you won't even be there for this event.

The world, the church has been given enough information. The church, you're not of that day, you're not even going through it, you're going to be caught up. That's what you need to know. But you also live your life in the light both of the coming of Christ for His own and of the terrifying terrible judgment on the sons of darkness to come in the future. To the world, there's a judgment day coming, you can't know what day and what hour. And even when the precursor signs begin to take place and wars and rumors of wars and famines and terrible pestilence, plagues, disease, earthquakes, and all of that stuff begin to escalate and Antichrist rises and there's a desolation of the temple in Jerusalem, and all of this is happening, amazingly the world alive at that time isn't going to expect Christ to come. It's going to be unexpected. They're not going to be ready.

No sane thief announces the hour of his coming. You don't get a postcard, "I'm going to rob your house Thursday between 8 and 10. Could you be away?" The generation alive at the day of the Lord event will have seen many preliminary events. But they won't be ready. They'll have enough evidence to know it is soon and they should be ready, but they won't know exactly the day or the hour. Look at chapter 24 verse 50, "The master of that slave will come in a day when he does not expect him and at an hour which he does not know and shall cut him in pieces and assign him a place with the hypocrites, weeping shall be there and the gnashing of teeth." They're not going to know.

Down in verse 44 of this chapter He says, "You better be ready because He's coming when you don't think He will." Chapter 25 verse 13, "Be on the alert then for you do not know the day nor the hour."

In Luke, look at chapter 12 just to show you the sort of complete use of this analogy. Luke 12:35, this is a very vivid description by our Lord. "Be dressed in readiness and keep your lamps lit and be like men who are waiting for their master when he returns from the wedding feast so that they immediately open the door to him when he comes and knocks. Blessed are those slaves whom the master shall find on the alert when he comes. Truly I say to you that he will gird himself to serve and have them recline at the table and will come up and wait on them. Whether he comes in the second watch or even in the third and finds them, so blessed are those slaves. And be sure of this, that if the head of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have allowed his house to be broken into. You too be ready for the Son of Man is coming at an hour that you do not

expect."

That's the key. The concept of a thief is the concept of unexpected, uninvited, unexpected. You also find the same analogy in Revelation 16:15. In Revelation 16:15 it says, "Behold, I am coming like a thief." Again I say the Lord is not a thief but He comes suddenly and unexpectedly. "Blessed is the one who stays awake and keeps his clothes on, lest he walk around naked and men see his shame." The point is, if the guy takes off his clothes and goes to bed and he gets looted in the middle of the night and he's roaming all over in the morning and has nothing to put on, it's shameful. So he says you better stay dressed and awake because I'm coming when you do not expect it.

There is one other usage of this same metaphor, not in an eschatological sense but in a historical sense. In Revelation 3:3 with the church at Sardis where they're warned that if they don't change their ways the Lord's going to come suddenly like a thief to them in judgment. So the concept of the thief in the night, the phrase "in the night" is used only here. The other ones talk about a thief but this one adds "in the night" because that's an obvious assumption that a thief would come in the night under the cover of darkness. And it fits what Paul wants to say also about the children of the day and the children of the night which is his main practical application of this while concept.

So, in answering their query, follow along, answering their query, Paul quotes the teaching of Jesus and says the exact time is not knowable. It is not knowable. And you already have all you need to know. But in saying that, in wanting them to know they don't need to know the times and the seasons, he quotes the Lord that His coming will be like a thief in the night. And in so doing he therefore introduces the phrase "the day of the Lord." The day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. And that leaves us with the question, what is this day of the Lord? How are we to understand it? What is it? It is one of the most important terms in the Bible repeating over and over very explicit events to come. It talks about God's future judgment. But what specifically is it?

Now I want you to follow this along, this is going to give you a foundational understanding of a very important concept that you'll bump into again and again in your study of the Bible. Four times in the New Testament the day of the Lord is mentioned. A number of other times it is referred to, four times the phrase "day of the Lord" is used, Acts 2:20, here, 2 Thessalonians 2:2 and 2 Peter 3:10. But its greatest usage is in the Old Testament. It is four times stated in the Old Testament "the day of the Lord." It is many more times referred to and described. But whatever the New Testament writer understood about the day of the Lord he got from the Old Testament prophet. So if we're going to understand what the day of the Lord is, we have to understand what it mean to the prophet of the Old Testament who prophesied it.

Let me give you a very simple little list of verses that will describe to you the character of the day of the Lord. Listen to this, this is what the prophets said about the day of the Lord. Isaiah 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." Isaiah 13:6, "Wail, for the day of the Lord is at hand." Isaiah 13:9, "Behold, the day of the Lord comes cruel with both wrath and fierce anger to lay the land desolate." Jeremiah 46:10, "For this is the day of the Lord, a day of vengeance, that He may avenge Himself on His adversaries." Joel 1:15, "For the day of the Lord is at hand, it shall come as destruction from the Almighty." Joel 2:11, "The day of the Lord is great and very terrible." Joel 2:31, "The sun shall be turned into darkness, the moon into blood before the coming of the great and terrible day of the Lord." Amos 5:18, "Woe to you who desire the day of the Lord, for what good is the day of the Lord to you?" Amos 5:20, "Is not the day of the Lord darkness and not light?" Malachi 4:5, "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord." Zephaniah 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." And then this, Zephaniah 1:15, "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."

It's all negative. All the prophetic word of the day of the Lord is about judgment, it is about bringing people low. It is wrath and anger and desolation and vengeance and destruction and terrible. It is said that it is a time of gloominess and darkness and distress and trouble always. Six times it is referred to as a day of doom. Four times it is called a day of vengeance.

Now always the day of the Lord refers to the most cataclysmic final judgment of God on the wicked. It is culmination of God's fury in a final blast that consumes the wicked. It is climactic. Now it is true that in the Old Testament there were times when God brought wrath on people and He used providentially controlled human means like one nation destroying another nation, or He used famines or earthquakes or whatever in the natural course of things to act as instruments of His judgment. But those are only preludes to the final almighty supernatural cataclysm that ends the great judgment against the wicked. It is so in the end there will be wars, there will be famines, there will be diseases, probably the plague of AIDS and things like that and other ones. Those are natural means by which God will begin to effect the working of His wrath on the ungodly, but those are only preliminary to the full blast of the fury of the Son of God who comes in supernatural power and just consumes all of the ungodly.

So you have throughout the Old Testament illustrations of this where God uses natural and human means to effect His wrath against some people. But then finally in some climactic way there is a major cataclysm that wraps up the judgment, that is a picture historically of the final supernatural cataclysm called the ultimate day of the Lord. And so even in the Old Testament there were a number of days of the Lord in a historical sense when God came and finally just swept His people away. The northern kingdom was swept away, as you remember, into captivity. The southern kingdom, Judah, swept away in a holocaust, dispossessed right out of their land and removed in the judgment of God. Those the prophets called a day of the Lord. And they were preceded by certain judgments that were like preliminary or precursor and then whom...they were swept away. Those were historical pictures of the ultimate end when there will be wars and famines and things like that

and earthquakes and then...whoof, God will just sweep everybody away in a final cataclysm. As you look at the unfolding of the sealed judgments in Revelation, and we'll do that next time, the trumpet judgments, the bowl judgments, you see at the beginning those judgments begin to unfold and there are wars and earthquakes and famines and then all of a sudden they move from the natural to the supernatural. And when you hit the sixth seal, all of a sudden supernatural holocausts start to take place because the wrath of God has reached the culmination of the day of the Lord. So you need to understand that.

The New Testament calls that day His day. It calls it the day of wrath. It calls it the day of wrath and revelation. It calls it the great day of God Almighty. It calls it...Peter calls it, 1 Peter 2:12, the day of visitation. But always, now listen carefully, it is the time when God unleashes His final fury on the sinners of the Earth and sweeps them away.

Now just a footnote. It must be distinguished from the day of Christ or the day of the Lord Jesus, or the day of the Lord Jesus Christ, or the day of Jesus Christ. Those phrases are all used. The day of Christ is used twice in Philippians. The day of Jesus Christ in Philemon. The day of the Lord Jesus in 1 and 2 Corinthians. And the day of the Lord Jesus Christ in 1 Corinthians 1:8. Now listen very carefully. The day of Christ, or the Lord Jesus Christ or the Lord Jesus always has to do with...watch this...believers. It always has to do with the time of being rewarded by Christ, a time when believers enter in to their redemption and their reward and their eternal glory. The day of Christ then associates with the Rapture and the redemption and reward of saints. The day of the Lord associates with judgment on the ungodly.

There is one other phrase, the day of God, used in 2 Peter 3:12 and that refers to eternity. That's God's day. Christ's day, He takes His church. The Lord's day, the sovereign Lord comes in judgment. God's day, the eternal state. So you need to make those distinctions.

The day of the Lord then must uniquely be seen as a period of judgment, judgment on the wicked, judgment in a final cataclysm that comes at the culmination of some other preliminary judgments. And that's why you open Revelation and the first five seals are the preliminaries and the sixth seal, bang, everything goes black, the sun goes out, the moon turns dark, the skies go out, the stars begin to fall, people scream for the rocks and the mountains to fall on them. Jesus Christ appears in the sky and the sign of His coming and that's the beginning of the day of the Lord. But it follows those precursors that are outlined before that. And we'll go in to detail on those in our next lesson.

Now when Jesus said this day of the Lord judgment will come like a thief in the night, He meant it will come unexpectedly. Even though there are precursors and things happening, the world won't believe it...they won't believe it. In fact, look at verse 3, they will be saying...what?, what will they be saying?... "Peace and safety." I'll explain that next time. How could they say that? I'll tell you how they could say it, and I'll tell you why they say it. But that's what they say. Oh peace, everything is

going to be fine. How can you believe that when all these things are going on, earthquakes, wars, rumors of wars, famines? But that's what they say. They're not going to expect it. And so there's always the sense of imminency, it's going to come like a thief, it's going to come like a thief, it's going to come when you don't expect it, it's going to come suddenly. Always imminency, nearness, expectation is projected into passages which deal with the day of the Lord.

Listen to Ezekiel 30 verse 3, "The day is near, even the day of the Lord is near." Joel 2:1, "The day of the Lord is coming, it is at hand." Joel 3:14, "The day of the Lord is near." Obadiah 15, "The day of the Lord upon all nations is near." Zephaniah 1:7, "The day of the Lord is at hand." Zechariah 14:1, "The day of the Lord is coming." They were saying that then and we're not there yet. But there was always that sense that it could come at any moment.

The prophets also were looking at a historical day of the Lord that was near, that would be a preview of what the final one would be. And so I need to just mention this to you, very important interpretative thought. Whenever the prophets write about the day of the Lord, they're looking at two things. They're looking at a historical day of the Lord that's going to happen soon. And they're looking at the ultimate culmination in the final day of the Lord. So we call that a near/far prophecy. It has a near/far interpretation. You shouldn't be surprised by that. Many of the Psalms that David wrote about himself were Messianic, right? He was really talking about the Messiah. When David said in Psalm 69 the reproaches that have fallen on Thee are fallen on me, zeal for your house has eaten me up...he's saying, God, I love You so much, I'm so zealous for Your house that when You're reproached I feel the pain. And he was talking about his own heart. And when Jesus came and cleansed the temple, He quoted it as if David was talking about Him. So you see on the horizon in many of the Messianic Psalms the Messiah, even though it's speaking about an individual in the past. Read Isaiah 7:14, "A virgin shall conceive and bring forth a son." As you read that you think it must be talking about the life time of Isaiah, but as you get to the New Testament and look back, it was talking about the Messiah. So you have a near and far significance many times.

When it comes to the day of the Lord prophecies, that's pretty typical. Let me give you an illustration. Go back to Joel chapter 1...Joel chapter 1. Joel chapter 1, and here is the word of the Lord and the word of the Lord comes in judgment, down in verse 15, "Alas for the day," Joel 1:15, "the day of the Lord is near, it will come as destruction from thee almighty." All right, Joel gives this prophecy and he says God's going to destroy, God's going to destroy, it's going to be the day of the Lord. Even tells them there's going to be locusts involved back in verse 4, the locusts are going to come and swarm all over the place, eat up all their food and everything. There's going to be a mighty invasion, verse 6 says, from a nation that's going to come in and tear them to shreds. What's he talking about? Listen, Joel is talking about the invasion of Assyria, of Assyria, it occurred in 701 B.C., a hundred years plus after Joel wrote this prophecy. In chapter 2 verse 1 he says, "Blow a trumpet, get everybody together, the day of the Lord is coming, it is near." Even though it was over a hundred years away. And in verse 11, "He's going to utter His voice, His camp is going to be great, strong is he who carries

out His Word, the day of the Lord is indeed great and very awesome and who can endure it." He's talking about a day of the Lord that was historical, when the Assyrians came with tremendous force over a hundred years after he said this and swept away the people of God. He also is speaking of the Babylonian captivity. He likely has in mind 605 to 586 B.C. which would even be further away where Judah was taken captive. And so he's looking at historical times when God sweeps the people away. There will be preliminary things happening and then...voom, they'll be swept away in a day of the Lord type judgment.

But then when you come to the end of his little prophecy, chapter 3, he leaps across millennia to the end time and the final day of the Lord. And as you pick it up in chapter 3 verse 9, he is beyond just that localized event and he's talking about the nations and a war and a major war, and all the nations, verse 12, are going to be aroused, they're going to come to the Valley of Jehoshaphat and there I will sit to judge all the surrounding nations. And all of a sudden now we're at the battle of Armageddon. Now we're there at the end time. And there's going to be an unbelievable activity, multitudes and multitudes, verse 14, in the valley of decision for the day of the Lord is near in the valley of decision. And then the sun and the moon grow dark and the stars lose their brightness. And here is the same scene described in Matthew 24, the same scene described in Joel 2, the same scene described in Revelation chapter 6 where the sixth seal bursts forth. This is the same scene, it's the end time, the sun, the moon are dark and here comes Christ in final holocaust of judgment. So he leaps from a historical day of the Lord to an eschatological one.

Look at Obadiah...Amos, Obadiah, the next couple of books and you see the same pattern. Obadiah 1 to 14 is talking about judgment on Edom. God is going to judge Edom, this neighboring nation that had rejected the true God. He said I'm going to send My judgment on you, Edom, and it is a day of the Lord kind of judgment. But when you get to verse 15, then he says the day of the Lord draws near on all the nations. And he jumps clear to the end of time and starts describing the end time and how all of the nations are going to be brought into judgment. And before the whole thing is done, the end of verse 21, the kingdom will be the Lord's and the Lord will reign after that final judgment.

Look at Zephaniah...Zephaniah is a few more books to the right. And Zephaniah chapter 1 looks at a day of the Lord. Verse 7, Zephaniah 1:7, "Be silent before the Lord God for the day of the Lord is near." And he goes on to describe the day of the Lord through verse 14, "Near is the great day of the Lord, near and coming very quickly, listen the day of the Lord," he says listen, listen, listen, you can hear it, you can hear it. And by the way, he's only about 15 years away from the Babylonian exile of Judah in 605. So he says it's coming soon, he's talking about a historical day of the Lord that's coming as they're hauled away into captivity, taken out of their land. But when you go to chapter 3 of this little prophecy, all of a sudden he jumps across all the millennia of time and another day. In chapter 3 verse 8 all the way to verse 20. I won't take the time to read it. He's looking at the very final day of the Lord and the establishment of the kingdom of Christ after the day of the Lord judgment has come upon all the world.

Isaiah does the same thing. And I won't even take you there. But Isaiah starts out predicting the Babylonian captivity which would be over a hundred years after his life, as it was over a hundred after Obadiah's and Joel's. And he's talking about that culminating final day of the Lord when the southern kingdom of Judah was all swept into captivity. And then he moves to the final eschatological day of the Lord, does Isaiah, and jumps from the historical to the eschatological or the final event in terms of judgment, that great day of reckoning of all nations.

And so it was a typical prophetic pattern. So as you study the Old Testament and you come to a day of the Lord passage, you may find that the prophets of the Old Testament so co-mingled history and eschatology and so blended them together that sometimes you can't draw the line finely through which is historical and which is eschatological. Don't be discouraged by that, that's a very difficult thing to do. But they saw preliminary indications that God's judgment was coming, followed by God coming in what's the day of the Lord kind of judgment sweeping the people away as a preview of the final day when God will have some preliminary human providentially orchestrated judgments culminating in a final sweeping away of the ungodly by God supernaturally. And so as one writer says, the eschatological day stands in the background on the distant horizon. And he writes, "The day of the Lord was near because was about to act and the historical event was in a real sense an anticipation of the final eschatological deed. The historical imminence of the day of the Lord did not include all that the day of the Lord meant. History and eschatology were held in dynamic tension for both were the day of the Lord," end quote. So says George Ladd(?).

Now as you look at the character in the coming of the day of the Lord, Joel gives us probably as direct a statement as to its nature. Listen to what he says. Joel 2:30, "And I will display wonders in the sky and on the earth. Blood, fire and columns of smoke, the sun will be turned into darkness and the moon into blood before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes. But whoever calls on the name of the Lord," he says, "will be delivered." Those who know the Lord will be delivered from that. But it will come. The sky goes dark. Blood, fire, smoke, blackness and then horrific judgment.

If you think that's graphic, the New Testament is far more graphic than that. And we're going to have to come back for that graphic description that the New Testament gives. It's frightening. The day of the Lord, he says, is coming. It is coming like a thief in the night. What does that mean? Unexpectedly, suddenly, unwelcomed and harmfully. It's going to bring harm. It's not going to be welcomed. It's going to be quick and it's not going to be expected. It's coming.

Paul certainly felt the Rapture could come in his life time, as all Christians have felt. He believed that the day of the Lord would follow the Rapture. But no believer would be in the day of the Lord. And the timing of all of that, we don't know. We don't know when the Lord's coming for His church. We don't know the moment, the day or the hour when He's coming in terrible judgment on the ungodly.

You say, "Well, now wait a minute. When those events start, won't the people alive at that time know?" They'll have all that information but they still won't know the day or the hour. And they'll be making exactly the wrong evaluation. They'll be saying peace and...what?...safety. For your encouragement, beloved, and for theirs, Paul says, verse 4, "Brethren, you're not in the darkness. The thief is coming in the night, you're not in the night. The day is not going to overtake you." We're in chapter 4, aren't you glad? We're not in chapter 5. Somebody is going to be in chapter 5, lots of people in chapter 5.

You say, "Well does chapter 5 have any implications for us?" Yes, yes. "Since," verse 5 he says, "we are sons of light and sons of day, and we're not of night and not of darkness, then let's not us sleep as others, but let's be alert and sober." And verse 8 he says, "Let's be characterized by faith and love and hope." In other words, let's live our life consistent with those who are to be called children of the day. Let's be alert. Let's not be like the sleeping drowsy drunken dark world, let's be always alert, always ready for the Lord's coming. It should have tremendous impact on our life because we should live as children of the day should live and not as children of the night. And we'll get to those great truths in our next study.

Father, thank You for our time this morning. We've covered so much and yet in some ways so little. We thank You for the great hope that we have that we shall some day in a day we don't know be caught up to meet Jesus in the air and to be gathered together with all those who have died in Christ, to be taken to the place You've been preparing for us to ever be with You. And then we know that all divine judgment will begin to break loose in this world. Father, we just pray that we might be on the one hand comforted, in the knowledge that all believers alive or dead shall be gathered together to Christ. And that also we might be exhorted on the other hand. And since we are not to participate in the night, we do not belong to the darkness, we will not be there when the thief comes. Help us not to live as children of darkness but as children of light. Help us not to worry about time because spiritual preparedness has nothing to do with clock watching, date setting, has nothing to do with sign seeking. It has to do with holy living in light of the fact that Jesus could come at any moment. So, Father, help us to live in expectancy, anticipation and consequent obedience and comfort, even as we look forward to those things which You have prepared for us which are too wonderful to be mentioned. We thank You that we shall escape the day of the Lord for we're not destined for wrath, not temporal, not eternal, but we're destined for fellowship with each other and with You. It's in that hope that we pray in Christ's name. Amen.

You may reproduce this Grace to You content for non-commercial purposes in accordance with Grace to You's Copyright Policy (<http://www.gty.org/connect/copyright>).