



THE DAY OF THE LORD and the Unbeliever

1 Thessalonians 5:1–3

OVERVIEW OF 1 THESSALONIANS

1:1 Salutation

1:2–10

Thanksgiving
for the
Thessalonians

2:1–12

Defense
of the
Ministry

2:13–16

Thanksgiving
for the
Thessalonians

2:17–3:10

Explanation
of Their
Separation

“what is
lacking”
(3:10)

3:11–13

Prayer
For What Is
Lacking

4:1–5:22

Instructions
for What Is
Lacking

5:23–28 Benediction

- What “was lacking” (3:10) included the Thessalonian believers’ anxieties over *the dead in Christ* and *the day of the Lord*.
 - In 4:13–18, Paul addresses their anxiety over death by providing them with new revelation about the resurrection and rapture of those in Christ.
 - In 5:1–11, Paul addresses their anxiety over the day of the Lord by reminding them of existing revelation and this day’s purpose for those outside of Christ.

- 1 Thessalonians 5:1–11 can be divided into two parts based on Paul’s important distinction in *pronouns*.
 - **5:3–4** – “While **they** are saying, ‘Peace and safety!’ then destruction will come upon **them** suddenly like labor pains upon a woman with child, and **they** will not escape. But **you** brethren, are not in darkness, that the day would overtake **you** like a thief.”
- In 5:1–3, the relationship of the day of the Lord to unbelievers; in 5:4–11, its implications for believers.

“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 labor pains upon a woman with child, and they will not escape.”

- I. **Its Undeniable Reality (v. 1)**
- II. **Its Unpredictable Advent (v. 2)**
- III. **Its Unmistakable Target (v. 3)**

—1 Thessalonians 5:1–3

I. Its Undeniable Reality (5:1)

“Now as to the times and the epochs, brethren, you have no need of anything to be written to you” (v. 1).

- **“Now as to”** – signals the transition to a new concern Paul wants to address.
 - It is not unrelated to the previous section (4:13–18), but distinct enough to be treated separately.

“Now as to **the times and the epochs**, brethren, you have no need of anything to be written to you” (v. 1).

- “the times and the epochs” – a phrase that instantly pointed to the events associated with the end times.
 - **Acts 1:7** – “He said to them, ‘It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority.’”
- “times” = *quantity* of time; the duration before the DOL.
- “epochs” = *quality* of time; the season fitting for the DOL.

“Now as to the times and the epochs, brethren, you have **no need of anything to be written** to you” (v. 1).

- “no need of anything to be written” – indicates the existence of previous revelation; the “day of the Lord” was not a new teaching.
 - This was different than Paul’s response to the Thessalonians’ anxiety over the “dead in Christ.”
 - **4:13** – “But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep . . .”

- The first reference—800 years before 1 Thessalonians!

- **Amos 5:18–20** – “Alas, you who are longing for the day of the LORD, for what purpose *will* the day of the LORD *be* to you? It *will be* darkness and not light; as when a man flees from a lion and a bear meets him, or goes home, leans his hand against the wall and a snake bites him. *Will* not the day of the LORD *be* darkness instead of light, even gloom with no brightness in it?”

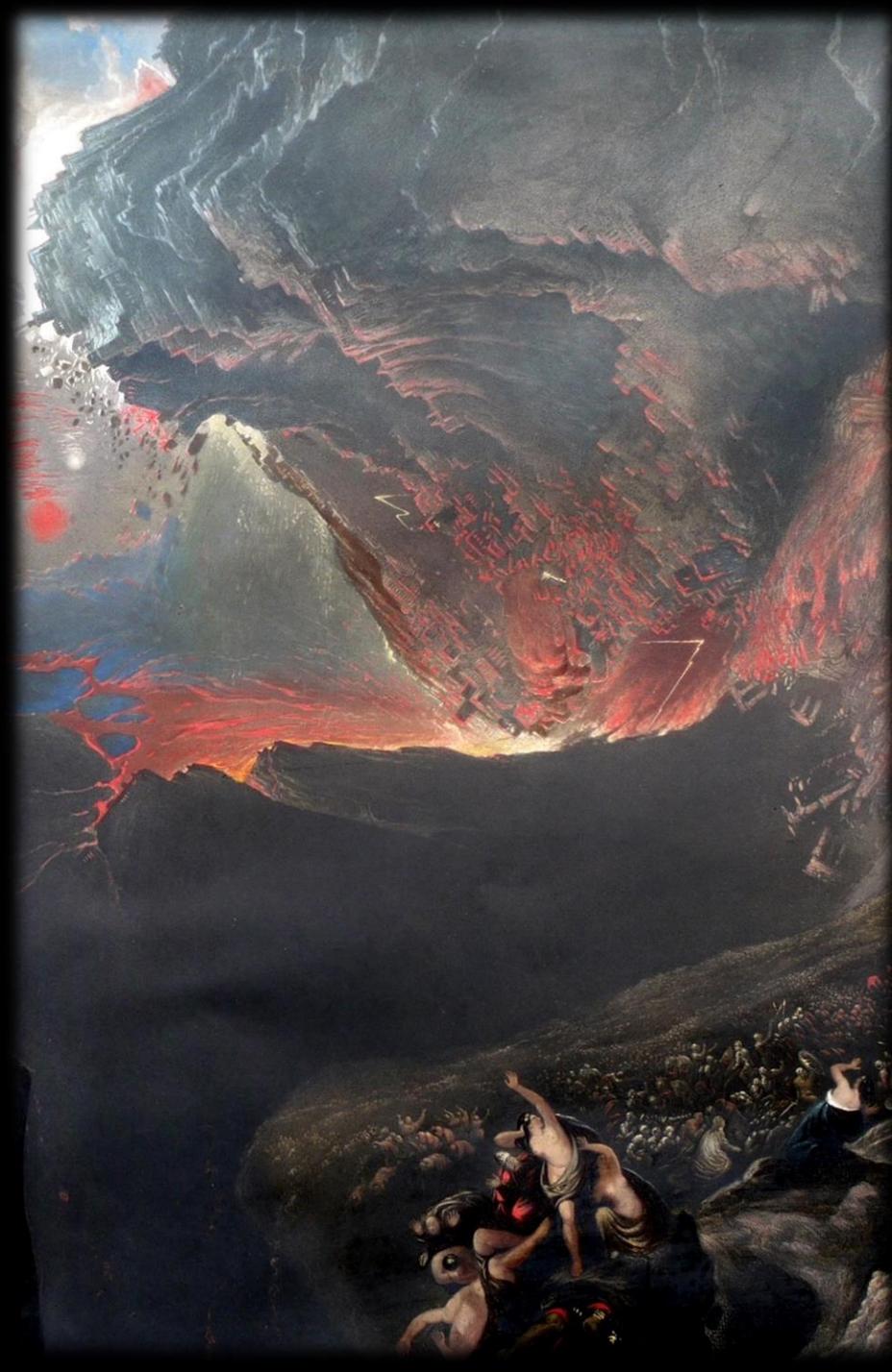


- **Isaiah 13:6** – “Wail, for the day of the LORD is near! It will come as destruction from the Almighty.”
- **Jeremiah 30:7** – “Alas! for that day is great, there is none like it; and it is the time of Jacob’s distress, but he will be saved from it.”
- **Ezekiel 30:3** - “For the day is near, even the day of the LORD is near; it will be a day of clouds, a time *of doom* for the nations.”

- **Zephaniah 1:14–16** – “Near is the great day of the LORD, near and coming very quickly; listen, the day of the LORD! In it the warrior cries out bitterly. A day of wrath is that day, a day of trouble and distress, a day of destruction and desolation, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness, a day of trumpet and battle cry against the fortified cities and the high corner towers. . . .

- **Zephaniah 1:17–18** – “I will bring distress on men so that they will walk like the blind, because they have sinned against the LORD; and their blood will be poured out like dust and their flesh like dung. Neither their silver nor their gold will be able to deliver them on the day of the LORD’s wrath; and all the earth will be devoured in the fire of His jealousy, for He will make a complete end, indeed a terrifying one, of all the inhabitants of the earth.”

- The “day of the Lord” runs through all the prophets.
- The phrase is used approx. 20x; its shortened form (“that day,” “the day”) approx. 75x.
- Its purpose: *judgment*.
- Its focus: *sinners*.
- Its arrival: *sudden & unexpected*.
- Its scope: *cataclysmic*.



“The day of the Lord is a day of judgment, a time when God executes just punishment upon rebels and enemies. When this judgment comes, the righteous are not the focus, although the result of the judgment of God’s enemies will be peace and blessing for them. The day of the Lord precedes blessing and is even the means by which blessing will come. But the day of the Lord is not blessing itself. It is darkness, not light.”

—Glenn Kreider, “Rapture and the Day of the Lord,” 75

33 See serpents, yee generation of vipers, how can yee escape the damnation of hell:

34 Wherefore behold, I send vnto you Prophets, and Wisemen, and Scribes, and some of them yee shall kill and crucifie, and some of them shall yee scourge in your synagogues, and persecute them from cite to cite:

35 That vpon you may come all the righteous blood shed vpon the earth, *from the blood of righteous Abel, vnto the blood of Zacharias, sonne of Barachias, whom yee slew betweene the temple and the altar.

36 Verily I say vnto you, All these things shall come vpon this generation.

37 O Hierusalem, Hierusalem, thou that killest the Prophets, * and stonest them which are sent vnto thee, how often would I haue gathered thy children together, euen as a hen gathereth her chickens vnder her wings, and yee would not:

38 Behold, your house is left vnto you desolate.

39 For I say vnto you, yee shall not see me henceforth, till ye shall say, Blessed is he that commeth in the Name of the Lord.

CHAP. XXIII.

1 Christ foretelleth the destruction of the temple: 3 what, and how great calamities shall be before it: 29 the signes of his comming to iudgement. 36 And because that day and houre is vnknown, 42 we ought to watch like good seruants expecting euery moment our masters comming.

2 And Jesus went out, and departed from the temple, and his Disciples came to him, for to shew him the buildings of the temple.

2 And Jesus said vnto them, See yee not all these things: Verily I say vnto you, * there shall not be left here one stone vpon another, that shall not be throwen downe.

3 And as he saue vpon the mount of Olives, the Disciples came vnto him privately, saying, Tell vs, when shall these things be: and what shall be the signe of thy comming, and of the end of the world:

4 And Jesus answered, and said vnto them, Take heed that no man deceiue you.

5 For many shall come in my name,

saying, I am Christ: and shall deceiue many.

6 And yee shall heare of warres, and rumors of warres: See that yee be not troubled: for all these things must come to passe, but the end is not yet.

7 For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdome against kingdome, and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes in diuers places.

8 All these are the beginning of sorrowes.

9 * Then shall they deliuer you vp to be afflicted, and shall kill you: and yee shall be hated of all nations for my names sake.

10 And then shall many be offended, and shall betray one another, and shall hate one another.

11 And many false Prophets shall rise, and shall deceiue many.

12 And because iniquitie shall abound, the loue of many shall waxe cold.

13 But he that shall endure vnto the end, the same shall be saved.

14 And this Gospel of the kingdome shall be preached in all the world, for a witnesse vnto all nations, and then shall the end come.

15 * When yee therefore shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by * Daniel the Prophet, stand in the holy place, (who so readeth, let him vnderstand.)

16 Then let them which be in Iudea, flee into the mountaines.

17 Let him which is on the house top, not come downe, to take any thing out of his house:

18 Neither let him which is in the field, retorne backe to take his clothes.

19 And woe vnto them that are with child, and to them that giue sucke in those dayes.

20 But pray yee that your flight bee not in the winter, neither on the Sabbath day:

21 For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor euer shall be.

22 And except those dayes should be shortned, there should no flesh be saved: but for the elects sake, those dayes shall be shortned.

23 * Then if any man shall say vnto you, Loe, here is Christ, or there: beleeue it not.

24 For there shall arise false Christs, and

* Chap. 10. 17. Luke 21. 12. John 16. 2.

* Mar. 13. 14. * Dan. 9. 27.

* Mar. 13. 21. Luke 17. 23.

* Gen. 4. 8.
* Luke 13. 34.
* Chro. 24. 21.
* 4. Eld. 1. 30.

* Mar. 13. 1. Luke 21. 5.

* Luke 19. 44.

• The “day of the Lord” is also repeated in Jesus’ teaching (Matthew 24; Mark 13; Luke 21).

■ **Matthew 24:21** – “For then there will be a great tribulation, such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever will.”

- The “day of the Lord” is affirmed by the apostles.
 - **Acts 2:20** – “The sun will be turned into darkness and the moon into blood, before the great and glorious day of the Lord shall come.”
 - **2 Peter 3:10** – “But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up.”

- A doctrine firmly established by the OT prophets.
- A doctrine emphasized by Jesus during His earthly ministry.
- A doctrine repeated in the preaching of the apostles.
- A doctrine which Paul taught the Thessalonians face-to-face (cf. Acts 17:1–9; 1 Thess 5:1–2).

DAY OF THE LORD = A FUNDAMENTAL OF THE FAITH

II. Its Unpredictable Advent (5:2)

“For you yourselves know full well that the day of the Lord will come just like a thief in the night” (v. 2).

- **“For”** – introduces the explanation for the absence of any reason to write (v. 1).
- **“you yourselves know”** – As he does through the letter, Paul calls the Thessalonians to testify (2:1, 2, 5, etc.).
- **“full well”** – “an exactness of knowledge as a result of careful teaching” (Hiebert, *1 & 2 Thessalonians*, 226).

“For you yourselves know full well that the day of the Lord **will come** just like a thief in the night” (v. 2).

- “**will come**” – literally, “is coming” – the present tense adds vividness and certainty; it is on the way.
 - **1:10** – “and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, *that is* Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath to come.”
 - **2:16b** – “But wrath has come upon them [the Jewish opponents to Christ] to the utmost.”

“For you yourselves know full well that the day of the Lord will come **just like a thief in the night**” (v. 2).

- “a thief in the night” – Paul uses a vivid analogy to describe the unpredictable nature of this coming event.

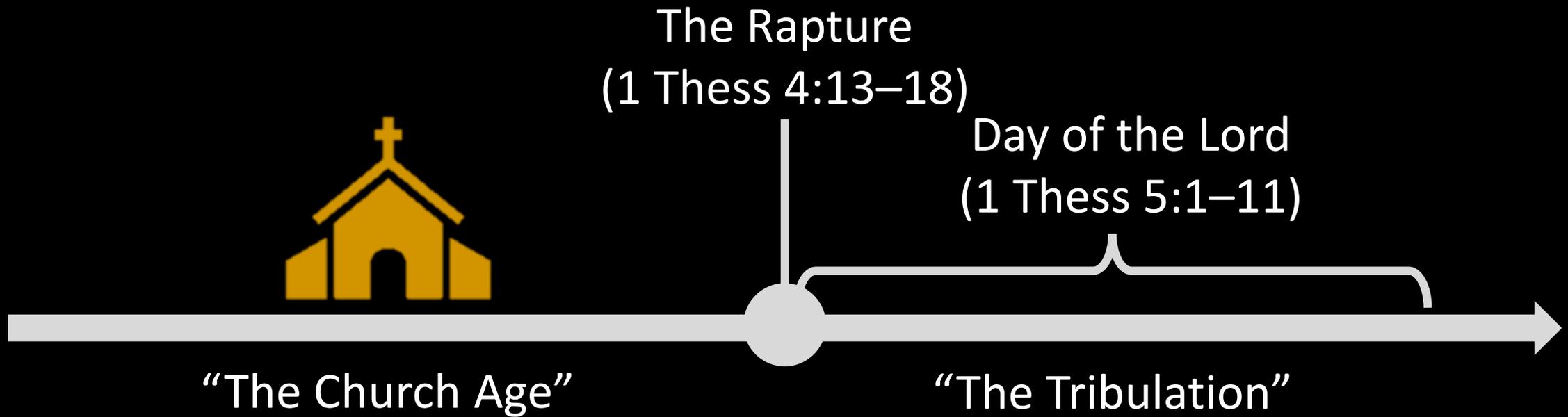
- The *modus operandi* of thieves is to strike unannounced, when least expected.
- The night provides the cover of darkness, the time when people are least alert.



- This fact clearly excludes *date-setting* or *predictions*:
“You yourselves know full well . . . that you cannot know!” (Note the irony.)

“This does not necessarily mean that it will come soon
But it does mean that it could come at any time, and when
it does it will come suddenly and without warning. The
warning has already been given. No further advance
warning is promised and none should be expected.”

—Kreider, “Rapture and the Day of the Lord,” 79



- Both the rapture of the church (4:16–17) and the day of the Lord (5:2–3) are *imminent* and *unpredictable*.
- The single-moment event of the rapture coincides with the beginning of the era of divine judgment.

“Only if the rapture coincides with the beginning of the day of the Lord can both be imminent and the salvation of those in Christ coincide with the coming of wrath to the rest of the world. Were either the rapture or the day of the Lord to precede the other, one or the other would cease to be an imminent prospect, and thus the ‘thief in the night’ and related expressions (cf. 1:10; 4:15, 17) would be inappropriate.”

—Robert Thomas, “1 Thessalonians,” 421

III. Its Unmistakable Target (5:3)

“While **they** are saying, ‘Peace and safety!’ then destruction will come upon **them** suddenly like labor pains upon a woman with child, and **they** will not escape” (v. 3).

- Verse 3 does not add anything significant to what was stated in v. 2.
- Paul includes it to heighten the contrast between those in Christ (“you, brothers”—v. 4) and those outside of Christ (“they,” the non-brothers—v. 3).

“While they are saying, **‘Peace and safety!’** then destruction will come upon them suddenly like labor pains upon a woman with child, and they will not escape” (v. 3).

- Paul draws from another well-known OT analogy—of false teachers claiming that things will be “just fine.”



- **“Peace”** – personal tranquility and comfort.
- **“Safety”** – freedom from outward interference.

“While they are saying, ‘Peace and safety!’ **then** **destruction** will come upon them **suddenly** like labor pains upon a woman with child, and they will not escape” (v. 3).

- “**then suddenly**” – the word order of the original emphasizes *suddenness*.
- “**destruction**” – “utter and hopeless ruin, the loss of all that gives worth to existence” (Milligan, *Thess*, 65).
- This signals the impact of “wrath” (1:10), the dissolution of “peace and safety” (5:3), when men will start to desire death (Rev 9:6).

“While they are saying, ‘Peace and safety!’ then destruction **will come upon them suddenly **like labor pains** upon a woman with child, and they will not escape” (v. 3).**

- **“will come”** – the experience of being overtaken by sudden misfortune; in the present tense (“comes”) adding vividness and certainty.
- **“like labor pains”** – Paul uses another analogy that needs no explanation.
- Once the time comes, the pains cannot be paused; the process takes over and is unstoppable.



“They will be terrified, pains and anguish will take hold of *them*; they will writhe like a woman in labor, they will look at one another in astonishment, their faces aflame. Behold, the day of the LORD is coming, cruel, with fury and burning anger, to make the land a desolation; and He will exterminate its sinners from it.”

—Isaiah 13:8–9

“While they are saying, ‘Peace and safety!’ then destruction will come upon them suddenly like labor pains upon a woman with child, **and they will not escape” (v. 3).**

- **“they will not escape”** – a very strong negation: “by no means!”
- The judgment is *severe*, and the extent is *total*.
- “It is unspiritual ignorance, not to say folly, to apply this to the destruction of Jerusalem or to death, as some have done and do. It is the day of the Lord yet to fall on the world” (Kelly, *Thessalonians*, 58).

Questions for Self-Examination

How does my view of God need to change?

To which category of men do I belong?

Am I thankful for the atonement of Christ?

