

1Thessalonians 5:1-11 God Has Not Destined Us For Wrath

1 Thessalonians 5:1-11 ^{NAU} Now as to the times and the epochs, brethren, you have no need of anything to be written to you. ² For you yourselves know full well that the day of the Lord will come just like a thief in the night. 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. ⁴ But you, brethren, are not in darkness, that the day would overtake you like a thief; ⁵ for you are all sons of light and sons of day. We are not of night nor of darkness; ⁶ so then let us not sleep as others do, but let us be alert and sober. ⁷ For those who sleep do their sleeping at night, and those who get drunk get drunk at night. ⁸ But since we are of *the* day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet, the hope of salvation. ⁹ For God has not destined us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, ¹⁰ who died for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep, we will live together with Him. ¹¹ Therefore encourage one another and build up one another, just as you also are doing.

As Paul begins to close his letter to the church in Thessalonica he returns to the theme of the last days as Christ is promised to return in glory to resurrect/rapture His church from every corner of the earth on the last day.

And evidently, this is not the first time that these believers had heard this teaching as to when this event will take place because Paul now launches into an overview of their understanding of this event.

He begins with the words in verse one, "Now as to the times and the epochs, brethren, you have no need of anything to be written to you."

The times and epochs, or seasons, as some translations put it, have to do with the will of God being played out in time, according to the redemptive plan of God from all of eternity.

This is why, for example, Paul can speak of Jesus, the Messiah, coming at a particular time in history that had been planned out by the Father.

1 Timothy 2:5-6 ⁵ For there is one God, *and* one mediator also between God and men, *the* man Christ Jesus, ⁶ who gave Himself as a ransom for all, the testimony *given at the proper time*.

The proper time could only have been in the time frame in which He was born, lived, died and rose from the dead in the first century. According to God's own word there could not have been any other time in history where this could take place.

And just as true and faithful as God was to reveal His Son in these last days, according to the opening verses of Hebrews chapter one, so too will He be faithful to reveal His Son in His second coming to this earth to judge, to gather His people, and to restore this universe at the appearing of Christ, which He will bring about at the proper time.

1 Timothy 6:13-16 ¹³ I charge you in the presence of God, who gives life to all things, and of Christ Jesus, who testified the good confession before Pontius Pilate, ¹⁴ that you keep the commandment without stain or reproach *until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ*, ¹⁵ *which He will bring about at the proper time*-- He who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords, ¹⁶ who alone possesses immortality and dwells in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see. To Him *be* honor and eternal dominion! Amen.

Well, the proper time is not a time that we can determine, but a time in which the Son, the Father and the Holy Spirit have determined. But Jesus has given us signs and events that will help us identify the proper time.

We've already discussed some of the times and epochs as we looked to Jesus' own words in Matthew 24.

Matthew 24:6-9 ⁶ "You will be hearing of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not frightened, for *those things* must take place, but *that* is not yet the end. ⁷ "For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom, and in various places there will be famines and earthquakes. ⁸ "But all these things are *merely* the beginning of birth pangs. ⁹ "Then they will deliver you to tribulation, and will kill you, and you will be hated by all nations because of My name.

Toward the end, before Christ's return, these things will be taking place. But then Jesus begins to nail down the time closer to the end

when He discusses a series of events that have to do with the harlotry of the church itself.

Matthew 24:15-16 ¹⁵ "Therefore when you see the ABOMINATION OF DESOLATION which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand), ¹⁶ then those who are in Judea must flee to the mountains.

The abomination of desolation speaks to those who have apostasized and have usurped the authority of the church to where they replace the holiness of Christ's redemptive plan with an abominable teaching of the man of sin, which excludes Christ from the equation, and in so doing they stand in the holy place declaring themselves to be above God.

This is what Paul was addressing when writing to the Thessalonians in his second letter.

2 Thessalonians 2:3-4 ³ Let no one in any way deceive you, for *it will not come, (the return of Christ)*, unless the apostasy comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, ⁴ who opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as being God.

What Jesus and Paul are speaking about is a time and epoch that the Thessalonians had evidently understood and needed no further explanation from Paul regarding the coming of the Lord and what must precede it.

But in identifying this time frame, which must include the rest of our Lord's words on the subject of His return in Matthew 24, where the sun ceases to shine, the moon turns to blood and the stars of heaven fall to the earth, Paul reminds his readers that in the midst of what appears to be cataclysmic events there also seems to be relative calm.

1 Thessalonians 5:2-3 ² For you yourselves know full well that the day of the Lord will come just like a thief in the night. 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.

Some have tried to reconcile this dichotomy where the world is unaware of the Lord's return because all are saying, peace and safety, with the words of Jesus also describing global chaos, by

suggesting that what is being spoken of are two separate events; one where the world is at peace at Christ's rapture of the church, and the subsequent events that lead up to His coming judgment of the world.

But as we saw last time the rapture and the resurrection of all believers happens on the last day, the same day that Christ returns to judge the world.

John 6:39-40,44 ³⁹ "This is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing, but *raise it up on the last day*. ⁴⁰ "For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him will have eternal life, and *I Myself will raise him up on the last day*." ⁴⁴ "No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and *I will raise him up on the last day*."

John 12:48 ⁴⁸ "He who rejects Me and does not receive My sayings, has one who judges him; *the word I spoke is what will judge him at the last day*."

^{NAU} **Acts 17:31** because *He has fixed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness* through a Man whom He has appointed, having furnished proof to all men by raising Him from the dead."

The day that is fixed is what is called the last day and both judgment and the resurrection/rapture of the church happens on that final day.

Again, keep in mind that if the resurrection takes place on the last day and these who are resurrected will precede those who are alive at His coming, (the rapture), then it necessarily follows that the rapture must come after this resurrection, thus placing both events at the last day.

So, when Paul says in our text that ² "...you yourselves know full well that the day of the Lord will come just like a thief in the night," they understood that this final day will take everyone by surprise. Those who will not be taken by surprise are those looking at the signs that Jesus spoke of and understand that the language being used for the great apostasy and the abomination of desolation are in association with those signs of the tribulation that the people of God are going to endure.

Matthew 24:20-22 ²⁰ "But pray that your flight will not be in the winter, or on a Sabbath. 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. ²² "Unless those days had been cut short, no life would have been saved; but for the sake of the elect those days will be cut short.

This tribulation will be no small thing because the world-at-large will have deemed the people of God who follow Christ to be a scourge on the land. And in those days after this tribulation our Lord then says these words.

Matthew 24:29-31 ²⁹ "But immediately after the tribulation of those days THE SUN WILL BE DARKENED, AND THE MOON WILL NOT GIVE ITS LIGHT, AND THE STARS WILL FALL from the sky, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. ³⁰ "And then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the SON OF MAN COMING ON THE CLOUDS OF THE SKY with power and great glory. ³¹ "And He will send forth His angels with A GREAT TRUMPET and THEY WILL GATHER TOGETHER His elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other.

Notice two things happen here immediately after the tribulation of those days: 1) the sun will be darkened, the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from the sky. 2) the Son of Man will come on the clouds of the sky with power and great glory.

We're not told here that they happen simultaneously, only that they happen consecutively. So, what is the sun being darkened, the moon not giving its light and the stars falling from the sky and the powers of the heavens being shaken just prior to the return of Christ in power?

If we take these words in a literalistic approach we would have to conclude that the sun will literally be darkened for an extended period of time. Since a total eclipse of the sun only happens with the moon temporarily obstructing its view from us here on earth this cannot be what Christ is talking about.

We are also told that the moon will not give its light. Well, the moon usually gives its light during the night cycles of the earth, so for it not to give its light suggests that something obstructs it. And we know that during full moons, when the earth comes between it and the sun, the moon is eclipsed, but again, for only a short period of time.

It is a version of this eclipse of the moon there is what is called a blood moon, but like the total eclipse this is only for a relatively short period of time. None of these events can qualify for what Jesus talks about in Matthew 24, especially the stars falling from the sky to the earth, which is what the book of Revelation also addresses.

Revelation 6:12-17 ¹² I looked when He broke the sixth seal, and there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth *made* of hair, and the whole moon became like blood; ¹³ ***and the stars of the sky fell to the earth***, as a fig tree casts its unripe figs when shaken by a great wind. ¹⁴ The sky was split apart like a scroll when it is rolled up, and every mountain and island were moved out of their places. ¹⁵ Then the kings of the earth and the great men and the commanders and the rich and the strong and every slave and free man hid themselves in the caves and among the rocks of the mountains; ¹⁶ and they said to the mountains and to the rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the presence of Him who sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb; ¹⁷ for the great day of their wrath has come, and who is able to stand?"

This description is one that takes place on the great day of wrath, and as we have been saying, it is the last day, the day of the Lord, or the day of God.

If these events take place on the last day it is conceivable that you could have the heavens and the earth being affected in unusual ways as we are also told that on the last day the heavens and the earth will be burned with intense heat.

But the events of Matthew and Revelation seem to imply that they will take place prior to the destruction of the universe as it is transformed into the new heavens and new earth. If the language of Revelation is to be taken in a literalistic way then the stars falling from the sky are not real stars, since the nearest star is our sun and it would not take much for it to move slightly and incinerate the entire earth.

The language that Jesus uses in both Matthew and Revelation is language that is figurative in nature and it still cannot be divorced from the language that describes the condition of the world just prior to His coming, which will be like a thief in the night, or just as in the days of Noah that Peter describes.

So, in what sense then do all of these amazing signs in the sky and on the earth describe this last day of Jesus returning in power? These signs are, in part, metaphors describing the spiritual condition of both believers and unbelievers at the time of Christ's second coming on the last day, even as the abomination of desolation is describing, not a physical temple being desecrated in Jerusalem, but the temple of God found in every believer who is part of the Holy City or church.

During this time we are commanded to flee from its influence as we reject the doctrines of demons and embrace wholly the truth of God's word and His Messiah, Jesus.

Matthew 24:15-18 ¹⁵ "Therefore when you see the ABOMINATION OF DESOLATION which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place (let the reader understand), ¹⁶ then those who are in Judea must flee to the mountains. ¹⁷ "Whoever is on the housetop must not go down to get the things out that are in his house. ¹⁸ "Whoever is in the field must not turn back to get his cloak.

This language is describing the utter necessity to quickly remove ourselves from the presence of this abomination of desolation, which we have seen previously is describing the desecration of the church whereby Christ is replaced with a lie. Jesus in Matthew is telling us to come out of that church and this same theme is what Paul addresses in his second letter to the Corinthians.

2 Corinthians 6:16-18 ¹⁶ Or what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; just as God said, "I WILL DWELL IN THEM AND WALK AMONG THEM; AND I WILL BE THEIR GOD, AND THEY SHALL BE MY PEOPLE. ¹⁷ "Therefore, COME OUT FROM THEIR MIDST AND BE SEPARATE," says the Lord. "AND DO NOT TOUCH WHAT IS UNCLEAR; And I will welcome you. ¹⁸ "And I will be a father to you, And you shall be sons and daughters to Me," Says the Lord Almighty.

In a similar way, the language of Matthew 24, when describing the conditions of the world in those last days, is showing how the light of the world, found in both sun and moon, will be diminished and fall from its proper place as Satan is loosed for a short time to deceive the world and to take the lead in the tribulation of those days of the true believers and then to infiltrate the church and make it filthy with the lies from the pit.

God's people must flee from this filth while continuing to be the light the best way they can as they flee to the mountains, a picture of refuge which is found in the mountain of God that surrounds Jerusalem.

Luke 21:20 ²⁰ "But when you see Jerusalem surrounded by armies, then recognize that her desolation is near.

The armies surrounding Jerusalem is the world coming against the heavenly Jerusalem, as they move toward the desolation of that holy body of Christ, as the lawlessness that characterizes mankind, (the man of sin), seeks to desecrate what will be the corporate church. The writer of Hebrews paints a picture of this "Jerusalem" in the final days leading up to the time where Christ shakes all creation as He ushers in His Kingdom.

Hebrews 12:22-29 ²² But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels, ²³ to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the Judge of all, and to the spirits of *the* righteous made perfect, ²⁴ and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood, which speaks better than *the blood* of Abel. ²⁵ See to it that you do not refuse Him who is speaking. For if those did not escape when they refused him who warned *them* on earth, much less *will* we *escape* who turn away from Him who *warns* from heaven. ²⁶ ***And His voice shook the earth then, but now He has promised, saying, "YET ONCE MORE I WILL SHAKE NOT ONLY THE EARTH, BUT ALSO THE HEAVEN."*** ²⁷ This *expression*, "Yet once more," denotes the removing of those things which can be shaken, as of created things, so that those things which cannot be shaken may remain. ²⁸ Therefore, since we receive a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us show gratitude, by which we may offer to God an acceptable service with reverence and awe; ²⁹ for our God is a consuming fire.

Though the world will try to extinguish the light of the world through tribulation, the taking away of the means of communication of the gospel, we, the true church, will still be shining as every true believer continues to be the light of the world, a city set on a hill that cannot be hid.

And in those days we may be forced to flee from the institution called the "church" but we have the assurance that when we flee unto the Lord we will be fleeing to the mountains He has set in place that will not be moved.

Psalm 125:2 ² As the mountains surround Jerusalem, So the LORD surrounds His people From this time forth and forever.

So, as we come back to our text Paul continues to encourage us as he reminds us that though the rest of the world prior to Christ returning may be saying peace and safety, as they persecute the church in those days, as the real church is essentially going underground as it does in China, Syria and many other places around the world today, we will not be in the dark as the rest of the world who has no hope.

And it is in this setting that the world will find itself coming face to face with their creator.

1 Thessalonians 5:3 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.

But though the world, in its darkness, will be destroyed we do not have to fear that day because we are not in the dark as we have the light of the Son of God who has given us light and life eternal. This assurance will enable us to endure to the end and His coming will not overtake us like a thief in the night but will allow us to rejoice in our Knight in shining armor, if you will, who comes to rescue us.

1 Thessalonians 5:4-7 ⁴ But you, brethren, are not in darkness, that the day would overtake you like a thief; ⁵ for you are all sons of light and sons of day. We are not of night nor of darkness; ⁶ so then let us not sleep as others do, but let us be alert and sober. ⁷ For those who sleep do their sleeping at night, and those who get drunk get drunk at night.

Being alert and sober is to approach our walk with Christ in a way that actively seeks Him with the knowledge that the rest of the world wants us destroyed, especially in those final times before Christ's return. But because we are aware of the wiles of the world we need to live with our eyes open and looking for Christ as we seek Him above.

As Paul continues he once again compares the two groups, sons of light and sons of darkness, that Jesus compared in Matthew 13 as our Lord uses language describing this last day or great day of God's wrath that we have been discussing.

Matthew 13:37-40 ³⁷ And He said, "The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man, ³⁸ and the field is the world; and *as for* the good seed, these are the sons of the kingdom; and the tares are the sons of the evil *one*; ³⁹ and the enemy who sowed them is the devil, and the harvest is the end of the age; and the reapers are angels. ⁴⁰ "So just as the tares are gathered up and burned with fire, so shall it be at the end of the age.

The tares are not unwanted shrubs, but people, and the Lord is describing these two groups in the light of judgment at the end of the age. These same two groups are the same groups that Jesus describes in Matthew 24.

Matthew 24:36-42 ³⁶ "But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone. ³⁷ "For the coming of the Son of Man will be just like the days of Noah. ³⁸ "For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, ³⁹ and they did not understand until the flood came and took them all away; so will the coming of the Son of Man be. ⁴⁰ "Then there will be two men in the field; one will be taken and one will be left. ⁴¹ "Two women *will be* grinding at the mill; one will be taken and one will be left. ⁴² "Therefore be on the alert, for you do not know which day your Lord is coming.

Two groups: one is taken to be with the Lord, the other is left for destruction or as Jesus describes back in Matthew 13, the tares that will be gathered to be burned with fire at the end of the age.

And just as Jesus says in verse 42 to be on the alert, Paul says the same thing in our text.

1 Thessalonians 5:8-11 ⁸ But since we are of *the* day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet, the hope of salvation. ⁹ For God has not destined us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, ¹⁰ who died for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep, we will live together with Him. ¹¹ Therefore encourage one another and build up one another, just as you also are doing.

Being sober is to be self-controlled. It's the same message Paul gave a couple of verses earlier.

1 Thessalonians 5:6 ⁶ so then let us not sleep as others do, but let us be alert and sober.

Being self-controlled and alert is in the context of having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet, the hope of salvation.

The picture here is of battle dress. And while the world may war against God's people, and the church is full of false brethren and teachers, we are still required to give a defense of the faith that is within us and to use the means God has provided to fight the good fight.

Of course, the language of 1Thess.5:8 is reminiscent of the description of our spiritual armor that Paul describes to the Ephesians.

Ephesians 6:12-17 ¹² For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual *forces* of wickedness in the heavenly *places*. ¹³ Therefore, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. ¹⁴ Stand firm therefore, **HAVING GIRDED YOUR LOINS WITH TRUTH, and HAVING PUT ON THE BREASTPLATE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS,** ¹⁵ and having shod **YOUR FEET WITH THE PREPARATION OF THE GOSPEL OF PEACE;** ¹⁶ in addition to all, taking up the shield of faith with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil *one*. ¹⁷ And take **THE HELMET OF SALVATION,** and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

You'll notice that in Eph.6:17 Paul speaks of the helmet of salvation along with the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. In our text Paul elaborates of this helmet as he reminds us that it is this helmet that is our hope of salvation.

In other words, this hope, is what Paul has already addressed in chapter 4 of our text as he reminds us that Christ is coming back for us to resurrect all of His people to Himself on that last day, the day the trumpet sounds, and it is because of this that we should comfort one another with these words.

One of the greatest promises that we have in Christ is that we are not destined for wrath as Paul points out in our text in verse 9. Everybody, including you and me, deserves His wrath because we are all sinners and as such we are born into this world as children of wrath.

Ephesians 2:1-3 ^{NAU} And you were dead in your trespasses and sins, ² in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, of the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience. ³ Among them we too all formerly lived in the lusts of our flesh, indulging the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were *by nature children of wrath, even as the rest.*

Nothing makes us any better than any other person on this planet except for one thing and one thing only and that is the grace and mercy that has been extended to us as Christ has chosen us and set us aside for His glory as He takes our sin and in exchange gives us His righteousness. In Theological terms this is called double imputation.

And this is precisely what Paul continues to expound upon in Ephesians 2 when he goes on to tell us why we are no longer dead in our transgressions and therefore no longer children of wrath.

Ephesians 2:4-9 ⁴ But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, ⁵ even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), ⁶ and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly *places* in Christ Jesus, ⁷ so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. ⁸ For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, *it is* the gift of God; ⁹ not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.

Christ is the one who made us alive even when we were dead in our transgressions. To suggest that a dead person, spiritual or physical, can make themselves alive through their own will is to miss the point of the utter destructiveness of sin and how it affects our inability to search for the God of the bible.

Romans 3:10-12 ¹⁰ as it is written, "THERE IS NONE RIGHTEOUS, NOT EVEN ONE; ¹¹ THERE IS NONE WHO UNDERSTANDS, THERE IS NONE WHO SEEKS FOR GOD; ¹² ALL HAVE TURNED ASIDE, TOGETHER THEY HAVE BECOME USELESS; THERE IS NONE WHO DOES GOOD, THERE IS NOT EVEN ONE."

Only as we are made alive in Christ by the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit will we seek God and turn to Him instead of turning aside to our own ways of self-righteousness. And it is

because of this hope that is given to us in Christ that we are able to see our need for a Savior

This hope is to be placed at the forefront of our lives as we think on those things above as our heads are covered with the helmet of hope. Everyone has a destiny, but we are not destined for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ who died for us. So, whether we are awake or sleep, we live together with Him.

And because of this hope Paul ends this section with those words he has already shared at the end of chapter 4.

1 Thessalonians 5:11 ¹¹ Therefore encourage one another and build up one another, just as you also are doing.

In a world where many people are only out for themselves, even many in the church, it's always good to be reminded to consider others as more important than yourself as you look to use your gifts to edify the body of Christ so that each may be built up to carry on the work of the Kingdom of God.

Sometimes we think that the early church really had it all together and it was a virtual love feast, but even Paul knew that the last days started with the resurrection of Christ from the dead and that the enemy will do everything to come against God's kingdom. The same warnings he gave to these Thessalonians he gave to many others including the Ephesian elders. I'll end with this.

Acts 20:28-32 ²⁸ "Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. ²⁹ "I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; ³⁰ and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them. ³¹ "Therefore be on the alert, remembering that night and day for a period of three years I did not cease to admonish each one with tears. ³² "And now I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build *you* up and to give *you* the inheritance among all those who are sanctified.