

I OVERVIEW OF I THESSALONIANS

PURPOSE: To strengthen the Thessalonian Christians in their faith and to give them the assurance of Christ's return.

AUTHOR: Apostle Paul.

TO WHOM WRITTEN: Young church at Thessalonica and all believers everywhere.

DATE WRITTEN: About 51 A.D. from Corinth. It was one of Paul's earliest epistles.

SETTING: The believers of the young Thessalonian church needed to mature in their faith and to have a misunderstanding remedied concern the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. Some believers thought that the Second Coming was imminent. There were others who wondered whether those who had already died would experience a bodily resurrection at His Second Coming.

KEY PEOPLE: Paul, Timothy, Silas

BLUEPRINT:

- Faithfulness to the Lord (1:1-3:13)
- **Watchfulness for the Lord (4:1-5:28)**

MEGATHEMES

Persecution	Paul and the new Christians at Thessalonica experienced persecution because of their faith in Jesus Christ. We can also expect to experience trials and troubles as well. We need to stand firm in our faith in the midst of trials, being strengthened by the Holy Spirit.
Paul's ministry	Paul expressed his concern for this church even while he was being slandered. Paul's commitment to share the gospel in spite of difficult circumstances is a model we should follow.
Hope	One day all believers, both those who are alive and those who have died, will be united with Christ Jesus. To those Christians who die before Christ's return, there is hope of the resurrection of the body.
Being prepared	No one knows the time of Christ's return. We are to live moral and holy lives, ever watchful for His Coming. Believers must not neglect daily responsibilities, but always work and live as if the Lord was to return today.

II INTRODUCTION

In *I Thessalonians 5*, Paul reminded the Thessalonians, that this coming day of the Lord will mean judgment for the world and salvation for the church.

This day will overtake everyone as a thief in the night. If the believers are watchful and prepared, they will not be surprised by that day.

III SCRIPTURE

READINESS FOR JESUS' RETURN (5:1-3)
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I writing <i>I Thessalonians 5:1-11</i> , Paul's purpose was not to produce a comprehensive overview of end-time (i.e., eschatological) events, but to exhort believers to live in a manner consistent with their salvation in Christ. In the first three verses, the practical issue is that believers live with awareness that Christ will return to judge the world.

(1): **Suddenness of Jesus' Coming (i.e., Rapture):** Paul was likely addressing a question that was originated by the Thessalonians and his opening words show that the Thessalonians were clearly focused on the End Times, as First Century eschatologists; perhaps they were even over-focused. This church drew its healthy posture due to its anticipation of end-time events. Today's churches spend far too little time thinking about Jesus' Coming.

The Thessalonians were well taught about the return of Jesus and other prophetic matters, as Paul taught them about the times and the seasons regarding the return of Jesus. They had an idea of the prophetic times they lived in, and they could discern the seasons of the present culture. Were they correct in believing that the Day of the Lord was very near?

(2): **Day of the Lord:** The Day of the Lord has not yet occurred and is a future time when God intervenes directly and dramatically in world affairs. Predicted and discussed in the Old Testament (*Isaiah 13:6-12; Joel 1:15; Amos 5:18; Joel 2:28-32; Zephaniah 1:14-18; Zechariah 14:8-9; and Malachi 4:5*) and in the New Testament (*II Peter 2:9; Romans 2:5; Ephesians 4:30; and Philippians 1:6*), the day of the Lord will include both punishment and blessing. Jesus referred to the last day as the time that He would raise up those who had believed in Him for eternal life (*John 6:40*) and will judge sin and set up His eternal Kingdom.

The Thessalonians knew, and had been taught, that they couldn't know the day of Jesus' return. That day would remain unknown, and come as a surprise, as a thief in the night. A thief does not announce the exact time of his arrival. However, many Thessalonians felt it was going to be very soon and stopped working for the Kingdom.

It does not refer to a single day, but to a season when God rapidly advances His agenda to the end of the age. The day of the Lord "Is a familiar Old Testament expression. It denotes the day when God intervenes in history to judge His enemies, deliver His people, and establish His kingdom." (Hiebert)

(3): **What the Unsaved will Perceive:** The people who will be saying, "peace and safety" are clearly unbelievers, as these words constitute a false cry that all is well, somewhat in the vein of Old Testament false prophets (*Jeremiah 6:13-14; Ezekiel 13:10-16*).

This sudden coming, in a time when many say "Peace and safety!" must be distinct from the coming of Jesus described in *Matthew 24:15-35*. This coming of Jesus happens at a time of great global catastrophe, when no one could possibly say "peace and safety!" Comparing passages like this shows us that there must be, in some way, **two** aspects to Jesus' Second Coming:

- One coming is at an unexpected hour, the other is positively predicted by the 1290 days and the abomination of desolation;
- One coming is to a business as usual world similar to the time of Noah, the other to a world in cataclysm; and,
- One coming is meeting Him in the air (*I Thessalonians 4:16-17*), the other is Him coming with the resurrected saints (*Zechariah 14:5*) at the Battle of Armageddon.

The unsaved world is not prepared for God's judgment since they do not believe in it, and the unexpected nature of that day will be a tragedy for the unbeliever. They will be lulled to sleep by political and economic conditions, but they will be rudely awakened. Yet it will come upon them suddenly, as labor pains.

BEING IN THE LIGHT (5:4-7)

While divine judgment is at the core of the prophetic vision of the day of the Lord, Christians have nothing to fear at the coming of that day. Instead, they will welcome it with an expectant hope. However, it is good that we don't know exactly when Christ will return, for if we knew the precise date, we might be tempted to be lazy in our work for Christ. Christians must keep working for the Kingdom until they reach physical death or until they are raptured; whichever occurs first.

(4-5): Basis for Paul's exhortations: People whose lives are characterized by unbelief (*1 Corinthians 1:18*) and lack of a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, who is Light, will experience surprise at what happens when Christ does return (*Revelation 19:11-16*). Post-rapture Christians will be well-informed and will see the **signs and seasons** and will be ready.

Paul described Christians as sons of the light and sons of the day (*John 12:36; Ephesians 5:8-9*). By being in the light, they avoid darkness, and its negative attributes of ignorance, unbelief, and evil. Christians are the light of the world and the salt of the earth (*Matthew 5:13-16*).

In some respect, the coming of Jesus will be surprise for everybody, because no one knows the day or the hour (*Matthew 24:36*). This Scripture clearly refers to the rapture. But for Christians who know the times and the seasons, it will not be a complete surprise since the rapture is soon followed by the Great Tribulation. No one knows the exact hour a thief will come, but some live in a general preparation against thieves. Those who are not in darkness, who live as they are all sons of light and sons of the day; these people are ready for the return of Jesus.

(6-7): Christians characterized as both alert and self-controlled: The word, "alert", occurs in a number of passages in reference to watching for the Second Coming (*Matthew 24:42-43; Mark 13:34-37*). They also possess meekness, controlled temperance, or self-control; referring to a disciplined life and is one of the fruit of the Spirit (*Galatians 5:22-23*). Spiritually speaking, Christians need to be active and aware, to be on watch, vigilant and sober.

Certain behaviors are characteristically nighttime behaviors, such as sleep and drunkenness. "Sleep", in this context, refers to people who are not alert to what is going on or about to happen (e.g., asleep at the switch, clueless, retired in place). Their lack of awareness does not mitigate the consequences of their failure to protect themselves and others that they are responsible for.

BEHAVING AS BELIEVERS (5:8-10)

(8): Arm yourself against spiritual warfare: Paul's premise is that since Christians belong to the day, a self-controlled conduct with spiritual alertness describes their life-style. These translate into spiritual insight, purity, holiness, and transparent openness. The same symbolism in *Isaiah 59:17* and *Ephesians 6:14-17* of faith and love as the breastplate and hope as the helmet of salvation is used here. These are the necessary armor to wear to defeat the dark spiritual powers and principalities that are present to destroy your life (*Ephesians 6:11*).

Faith and love are represented by the breastplate because the breastplate covers the vital organs. No soldier would ever go to battle without his breastplate, and no Christian is equipped to live the Christian life without faith and love.

The **hope of salvation** is represented as a helmet, because the helmet protects the head, which is just as essential as the breastplate. Hope isn't used in the sense of wishful thinking, but in the sense of a confident expectation of God's hand in the future.

(9-10): No wrath for the believer: Paul tells the Thessalonian Christians that God did not appoint us to suffer His wrath (*John 3:36*), for, as believers, we are no longer under His wrath. Instead, He interacted with history to provide a way of salvation by sending His Son. It was **His initiative** (i.e., Sixth Dispensation of Grace).

However, for the appointment to be realized, Christians had to receive what God provided (*Romans 3:21*). God does not save people against their wills, nor does He save them in the absence of a personal commitment to Christ Jesus (*Revelation 3:20*). Before we had the hope of salvation (*1 Thessalonians 5:8*), we had an appointment to wrath. We no longer have an appointment to wrath, but now to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.

It is important to understand that Paul means the wrath of God. We are saved from the world, the flesh, and the devil. But first and foremost, we are rescued from the wrath of God, the wrath that we deserve (*Romans 3:23; Romans 6:23a*). Paul's whole context here is the believer's rescue from the wrath of God.

Our **appointment to wrath** was appointed in two ways. First, because of what Adam did to us and the whole human race we are appointed to wrath (*Romans 5:14-19*). Second, because of our own sin we are appointed to wrath (*Romans 3:23*).

When Jesus died on the cross, He stood in our place in our appointment to wrath, and reschedules us with an appointment to obtain salvation (*1 John 2:1*). As believers, when we think we are appointed to wrath, we show up for an appointment that was cancelled by Jesus. Those that don't know Him, do have an appointment to everlasting wrath at the Great White Throne Judgment (*Revelation 20:11-15*).

For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation: Paul put two interesting ideas side-by-side. "Appoint" emphasizes God's sovereignty, but "obtain" is a word that emphasizes human effort. Together, they show that the full scope of salvation involves **both** divine initiative and human effort. The human "effort" is defined in both *Genesis 15:6* and *Hebrews 11:6*.

This is the only place in *1 Thessalonians* where Paul stated that Christ died on behalf of sinners. The ultimate purpose in Christ's saving death is that believers may have everlasting life together with Him (*John 3:16*).

ENCOURAGING ONE ANOTHER (5:11)

The Christian should encourage others and build them up. The usual environment for this is fellowship.

(11): Our privilege is to comfort one another: Paul again tells us not to take comfort, but to give comfort. If all Christians have a heart to comfort each other, then all will be comforted.

To **edify** means to build up. When we have our first interest in building up other Christians, then God will edify us. The idea is of a church full of active participants, not passive spectators.

Exhortation, a spiritual gift, is another term for encouragement.

It wasn't that there was no comfort among the Thessalonians, or as if no one was edified, but they had to continue to do it, and to do it more and more. You can never over-edify or over-exhort.