

WHEN JESUS RETURNS, PT. 2: ABOUT TIMES AND DATES

The Gospel Difference, 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11

May 28, 2023

Now, brothers, about times and dates we do not need to write to you, for you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night

But you, brothers, are not in darkness so that this day should surprise you like a thief.

1 Thessalonians 5:1-4

Times and dates

Now, brothers, about times and dates we do not need to write to you, ² for you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. ³ While people are saying, “Peace and safety,” destruction will come on them suddenly, as labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape.

⁴ But you, brothers, are not in darkness so that this day should surprise you like a thief. ⁵ You are all sons of the light and sons of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness. ⁶ So then, let us not be like others, who are asleep, but let us be alert and self-controlled. ⁷ For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk, get drunk at night. ⁸ But since we belong to the day, let us be self-controlled, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet. ⁹ For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. ¹⁰ He died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him. ¹¹ Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.

1 Thessalonians 5

1. Jesus' *Parousia* will be an amazement to those walking in darkness
2. Jesus' *Parousia* will be the moment believers fully experience God's redemption

Why the Thessalonians already knew this

⁶ So when they met together, they asked him, “Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?”

⁷ He said to them: “It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. ⁸ But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

Acts 1:6-8 (see Jesus' statement in Matthew 24:36)

1. They had the prophetic history: Isaiah 13; Joel 2; Amos 5; Zephaniah 1,14; Malachi 4:5
2. They took seriously Jesus' final words



Light and Darkness

⁴ But you, brothers, are not in darkness so that this day should surprise you like a thief. ⁵ You are all sons of the light and sons of the day. We do not belong to the night or to the darkness. ⁶ So then, let us not be like others, who are asleep, but let us be alert and self-controlled.

1 Thessalonians 5

⁵ This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. ⁶ If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth. ⁷ But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.

1 John 1

³⁵ Then Jesus told them, "You are going to have the light just a little while longer. Walk while you have the light, before darkness overtakes you. The man who walks in the dark does not know where he is going. ³⁶ Put your trust in the light while you have it, so that you may become sons of light

⁴⁴ Then Jesus cried out, "When a man believes in me, he does not believe in me only, but in the one who sent me. ⁴⁵ When he looks at me, he sees the one who sent me. ⁴⁶ I have come into the world as a light, so that no one who believes in me should stay in darkness.

John 12

1. Those who sleep live as though there will be no judgment so they live in moral laxity
2. Those who are alert, watchful, are conscious of the coming judgment and living sanctified

What we can know about the when

³ As Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately. “Tell us,” they said, “when will this happen, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?”

⁴ Jesus answered: “Watch out that no one deceives you. ⁵ For many will come in my name, claiming, ‘I am the Christ,’ and will deceive many. ⁶ You will hear of wars and rumors of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. ⁷ Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places. ⁸ All these are the beginning of birth pains.

⁹ “Then you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me. ¹⁰ At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other, ¹¹ and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people. ¹² Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold, ¹³ but he who stands firm to the end will be saved. ¹⁴ And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come

³⁰ “At that time the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and all the nations of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory. ³¹ And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other.”

Matthew 24 (we’ll cover this passage during our Wednesday study)

1. This “Tribulation” begins with trouble and ends with The Trumpet of 1 Thessalonians 4
2. God limits this “turning away” for the sake of the elect (see 24:20-25)

Concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to him, we ask you, brothers, ² not to become easily unsettled or alarmed by some prophecy, report or letter supposed to have come from us, saying that the day of the Lord has already come. ³ Don’t let anyone deceive you in any way, for that day will not come until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the man doomed to destruction. . . .

⁶ And now you know what is holding him back, so that he may be revealed at the proper time. ⁷ For the secret power of lawlessness is already at work; but the one who now holds it back will continue to do so till he is taken out of the way. ⁸ And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will overthrow with the breath of his mouth and destroy by the splendor of his coming. ⁹ The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with the work of Satan displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders, ¹⁰ and in every sort of evil that deceives those who are perishing. They perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. ¹¹ For this reason God sends them a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie ¹² and so that all will be condemned who have not believed the truth but have delighted in wickedness.

2 Thessalonians 2:6

1. We won’t need a tweet – this archetypal “rebellion” will be GATDOTL evident
2. This “man of lawlessness” is the “abomination” of Daniel (see Matthew 24:15; Daniel 9:27, 11:31)
3. The “one” of 2:7 is the Holy Spirit (see Revelation 20:6ff.)

Living in the shadow of tribulation (or even Tribulation)

1. Facing the “man of lawlessness” is a spiritual exercise

¹⁰ Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. ¹¹ Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. ¹² For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. ¹³ Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. ¹⁴ Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, ¹⁵ and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. ¹⁶ In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. ¹⁷ Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. ¹⁸ And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.

Ephesians 6

2. Take advantage of evil restrained

⁵ Don't you remember that when I was with you I used to tell you these things? ⁶ And now you know what is holding him back, so that he may be revealed at the proper time. ⁷ For the secret power of lawlessness is already at work; but the one who now holds it back will continue to do so till he is taken out of the way.

2 Thessalonians 2

And I saw an angel coming down out of heaven, having the key to the Abyss and holding in his hand a great chain. ² He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil, or Satan, and bound him for a thousand years. ³ He threw him into the Abyss, and locked and sealed it over him, to keep him from deceiving the nations anymore until the thousand years were ended. After that, he must be set free for a short time.

Revelation 20

3. Put on faith, love and hope

But since we belong to the day, let us be self-controlled, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet. ⁹ For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. ¹⁰ He died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him. ¹¹ Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.

1 Thessalonians 5:8-11 (doesn't this feel like Ephesians 5-6?)

Resources for reading 1 Thessalonians

The poster for 1 Thessalonians can be found at bibleproject.com

Doug's favorite 1 Thessalonians commentaries include

Charles Wannamaker's NIGTC volume (Eerdmans, 1990)

Hendricksen's *Expository Commentary* (Baker, 1955)

Robert Thomas' volume in *Expositors' Bible Commentary* (Zondervan, 1981)

John MacArthur has a very interesting sermon, "The Ideal Church" at <https://www.gty.org/library/sermons-library/1317A>

Spurgeon's sermon on 5:6 is at <http://www.spurgeongems.org/sermon/chs1022.pdf> and his "Forever with the Lord" sermon on this text is at <http://www.spurgeongems.org/sermon/chs1374.pdf>

John Newton's "Great Advent" sermon is at <https://www.monergism.com/great-advent>

Thomas Schreiner has a wonderful essay on the optimism in 1 Thessalonians at http://www.sbts.edu/documents/tschreiner/3.3_editorial.pdf

Ligonier has a good summary of the rapture question at <https://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/what-is-the-rapture>

Kim Riddlebarger has some wonderful resources on the rapture question at

<https://www.kimriddlebarger.com/the-riddleblog/the-rapture?rq=the-rapture>

For a short overall look at the New Testament teaching on the Second Coming, I like this essay from Alan Bandy at TGC: <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/essay/the-return-of-christ/>

For a more Reformed theology of the Second Coming, I recommend Berkhof's summary at Theologue: <https://theologue.wordpress.com/?s=berkhof+second+coming>

Scott Clark has an interesting blog (which includes Norman's "I Wish We'd All Been Ready") at <https://heidelblog.net/2014/10/two-points-on-left-behind-and-the-secret-rapture-1/>

Cornelis Venema has an interesting commentary on the Revelation 20 passage at <http://graceonlinelibrary.org/eschatology/revelation-20/revelation-20-part-ii-the-millennium-is-now-by-cornelis-p-venema/>

Thomas Shreiner has a commentary on Revelation 20 at <https://www.crossway.org/articles/what-is-the-millennium-revelation-20/>

Peter Krol has a helpful discussion of the "man of lawlessness" at

<https://www.knowableword.com/2021/10/01/context-matters-the-man-of-lawlessness/>

John Piper has several very good sermons on 1 Thessalonians at <https://www.desiringgod.org/scripture/1-thessalonians?page=3>