

1 Thessalonians 5: 1 and 2; "The Day of the Lord", Sermon # 20 in the series - "A Persevering Faith", Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on August 31st, 2008, in the Afternoon Worship Service.

It is often the case with Christians that when they think about the subject of prophecy and our Lord's return that they get caught up in the excitement of thinking about when this great event shall happen. I suppose that this is natural to think that they should, seeing as it will be the greatest event of all of human history apart from our Lord's death and resurrection. But sometimes people do get caught up in trying to predict the year, the month, the hour and the day of His return, and when it does not happen they have been greatly disappointed. What is even worse, is, that sometimes they deceive themselves into thinking that since Christ did not come back bodily and physically, that He must have come back spiritually because their calculations of when He should have returned cannot be wrong. This was the case with a man named William Miller, one the forerunners of a sect called the Seventh Day Adventists. He had thought that he had determined by his calculations on the 2300 years prophecy of Daniel 8: 13 that Christ would return sometime between March 21st, 1843 and March 21st 1844. When this year came and went, and Christ did not show up bodily and physically to judge the world, there was great disappointment at first. He and others sympathetic to him, looked over their calculations, determined that they were not quite right, and they reset the date for October 22nd, 1844. When this day came and went, this was their reaction. "The sun rose on the morning of October 23 like any other day, and October 22, became the Millerites' Great Disappointment." "Hiram Edson recorded that "Our fondest hopes and expectations were blasted, and such a spirit of weeping came over us as I never experienced before..." "We wept, and wept, till the day dawned." "Following the Great Disappointment most Millerites simply gave up their beliefs." (I took this from Wikipedia) But others did not give up their beliefs, and they reformulated Christ's supposed return in 1844 to be a spiritual return, the cleansing of His spiritual sanctuary as a 2nd phase of Christ's atoning work. I certainly believe that this does dishonor to Christ's glorious return and the great things that will be done on that last Day to bring about the completion of our great salvation. Either Christ's work of atonement was finished on the cross when He said it was finished or it is not. We believe in a finished work of Christ at the cross and the application of all grace necessary to be saved is given to every believer who is to be saved by faith in Christ. It is given to them in their being called, converted, and justified. It is further given to them in sanctification. Grace is given so that all true believers die to sin through the death of Christ. We also believe that because of that initial sanctification that each and every true believer will go on to sincerely pursue holiness by faith in Jesus Christ. We believe that at the literal bodily appearing and return of our Lord Jesus Christ,

He will then bring about the glorification of every body of every one of His people, the completion of our redemption.

Because of these truths which are clearly found in the Scripture, it is very important that we learn to rightly divide the Word of Truth concerning this subject of the Lord's return. And the way that we rightly divide the Word of Truth is to compare Scripture with Scripture and not make up things around the Scripture which we cannot directly draw from it. I set before you the truth, last Sunday afternoon, that the Bible knows of only one literal, physical, bodily return of our Lord Jesus Christ. It will be on the last day of the world as we know it now. This great Day will also be the Day of the resurrection from the dead; the raising of all the people who have lived. Some will come forth to a resurrection of condemnation because they have rejected Jesus Christ as being their Savior and Lord. The others will come forth to a resurrection of life; a life of glory, immortality, and honor because they did have faith in God and in our Lord Jesus Christ, and they did repent of all their sins. It is this Day which every person ought to prepare for so that they will attain to the resurrection unto life, whether they lived in the time of the writing of this letter, or whether they are alive this very day. And so this afternoon we want to open up this subject of the times and the seasons by thinking about the way that Paul and the Lord Jesus Christ speak about the "Day of the Lord." We will make two simple points of it. First - Let us speak about the times and seasons in relation to the Day of the Lord. Then we speak briefly of the Day of the Lord as a Thief, a subject which I will expand upon more in another sermon.

First of all - Let us speak about the times and seasons in relation to the Day of the Lord. (verses 1-3)

"But concerning the times and the seasons, brethren, you have no need that I should write to you." "For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night." "For when they say, 'Peace and safety!' then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labor pains upon a pregnant woman." "And they shall not escape." Now you will notice that in verse one that Paul does not speak of the Day of the Lord's return as something which we will know the hour or the day of it. He speaks of the times and the seasons. He speaks of the Day of the Lord in a technically undefined way. The words are not written in such a way that it should be applied to 70 A.D. and to the future destruction of Jerusalem exclusively. This "day of the Lord" was indeed coming. There may be in these words a partial fulfillment in 70 A.D. But it is not the total fulfillment. Indeed it cannot be, because the Lord's coming was described for us in verses 13 - 18 of Chapter 4 as being the day of the physical resurrection of all the dead in Christ. Therefore it cannot possibly apply to 70 A.D. because many of the dead in Christ had not even been born, lived their life, or died yet. The prophetic principle that needs to be understood in regard to these words of the Apostle Paul is the hermeneutical principle of the law of double reference in regard to prophecy. Often, in the interpretation of prophetic passages of Scripture, we find that there is

a near fulfillment of the prophecy being given, and there a far fulfillment of the same words of the prophet.

The "day of the Lord" is a phrase that is used in the Old Testament prophetic books in a number of places. And it can legitimately refer to two or more separate events; events which are separated by hundreds or even thousands of years. Look over at Joel Chapter 1. Here we find the words, "the day of the the Lord" used in verse 15. "Alas for the day of the Lord is at hand; it shall come as destruction from the Almighty." The day of the Lord, this judgment of the Jewish nation and society by the judgments of God, was coming upon Judah because of the multiplied sins of the people. The prophet was writing seven to eight hundred years before Christ. There was the near fulfillment of that day. The Chaldeans were eventually going to come and wage war against them. The Babylonians also were coming and they would destroy the beautiful temple which Solomon had built. A judgment of locusts is mentioned as having already come upon them. There may indeed have been a literal judgment of locusts, even 4 different literal judgments of locusts; but it is evident from the context that these locusts represent men and armies. The day of the Lord was coming to Judah and Jerusalem, and it is mentioned again in Chapter 2, verse 1. "Blow the trumpet in Zion, and sound an alarm in My holy mountain!" "Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble; for the day of the Lord is coming, for it is at hand: A day of clouds and thick darkness, like the morning clouds spread over the mountains." "A people come, great and strong, the like of whom has never been; nor will there ever be any such after them, even for many successive generations."

Then look over at Chapter 2, verse 6. The prophet is still using the language of the metaphor of locusts, referring to a people coming to invade the land. "Before them the people writhe in pain; all faces are drained of color." "They run like mighty men, they climb the wall like men of war; every one marches in formation, and they do not break ranks." "They do not push one another; every one marches in his own column." "Though they lunge between the weapons, they are not cut down." "They run to and fro in the city, they run on the wall; they climb into the houses, they enter at the windows like a thief." Such is the word used by Paul in 1 Thessalonians 4; "the day of the Lord comes like a thief." Verse 10 says, "The earth quakes before them, the heavens tremble; the sun and moon grow dark, and the stars diminish their brightness." "The Lord gives voice before His army, for His camp is very great; for strong is the One who executes His word." "For the day of the Lord is great and very terrible; who can endure it?" "Now, therefore, says the Lord, turn to Me with all your heart..." Is he speaking to the generation in which the prophet wrote? Undoubtedly. Is He speaking through the prophet to coming generations? This is also undoubtedly true. Because later on in Chapter 2 we find some very special words in verse 23. "Be glad then, you children of Zion, and rejoice in the Lord your God; for He has given you the former rain faithfully, and he will cause the rain to come down for you--the former rain, and the latter rain in the first month." In the margin of verse 23 you will read these words as an

alternate rendering of this verse. "For He has given you the teacher of righteousness." This refers prophetically to the Lord Jesus Christ. And the words which follow agree with this. "So I will restore to you the years that the swarming locust has eaten, the crawling locust, and the chewing locust, My great army which I sent among you." Times of great blessing would eventually come to Israel once again after this "day of the Lord." Look at verse 28. "And it shall come to pass afterward that I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, your young men shall see visions." "And also on my menservants and on My maidservants I will pour out My Spirit in those days." "And I will show wonders in the heavens and in the earth; blood and fire and pillars of smoke." "the sun shall be turned into darkness and the moon into blood, before the coming of the great and awesome day of the Lord." "And it will come to pass that whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved."

Now you remember, I hope, where these verses are quoted in the New Testament? They are part of Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost. It was the official and formal public day of the beginning of the Church age. After the first "day of the Lord" in the first destruction of the city of Jerusalem in 605 B.C. where the temple was destroyed and the walls broken down and the government of the people by kings ceased and the people were taken away into captivity; came this restoration, this return, this rebuilding, and eventually the Lord Jesus Christ came and God restored the years which the locusts had eaten by the blessings that He brought. There were 4 kinds of locusts mentioned in Chapter 2, verse 25. B.H. Carroll believes that these 4 represent the 4 different world monarchies which invaded and took over the nation of Israel for a time. The Babylonian, the Medo-Persian, the Greek, and finally the Romans. There is something to be said for this. Because each one of them brought, in its own way, a day of the Lord to the Old Testament people of God. After those judgments came, later on, then God brought great blessing to Israel in sending His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. Then after His crucifixion and resurrection; the Old covenant, Old testament dispensation came to an end. God the Father and God the Son sent the Holy Spirit and a new Age began. It is the age that we are still in. But the complete end of the Old would not take place until 70 A.D. with "the day of the Lord" which came then. The sun would be turned into darkness and the moon into blood before the coming of that great day. This is not the day of the last judgment, which is yet in the future, and it is not the first day of the Lord which we saw in Joel 1: 15, which is far in the past. What I am trying to say is that this phrase, "the day of the Lord" depending on its context can refer in a 1st sense to a soon-coming judgment by God of the Jews, and then farther off judgments of the same, which would come. In regard to the culmination of these judgments, 70 A.D. and the destruction of Jerusalem would be the "day of the Lord" which would bring to an end the Old testament dispensation of God's dealings with Israel. It was the end of their age. It was the end of their world.

Secondly - The Day of the Lord as a thief. (Verse 2)

What we have talked about thus far does not mean an end of the application of this phrase, "the day of the Lord", when it comes to New Testament prophecy. There was a day of the Lord which took place when the 4th World Monarchy of Rome fell in New Testament times; Christ coming to judgment upon the false system of Emperor worship. After the 6 seals were opened in Revelation 6: 15 there came a time of judgment against the Pagan Roman Empire. It says, "And the kings of the earth, the great men, the rich men, the commanders, the mighty men, every slave and every free man, hid themselves in the caves and in the rocks of the mountains, and said to the mountains and the rocks, 'Fall on us and hide us from the face of Him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb!' "For the great day of His wrath has come, and who is able stand.

There will yet be a "day of the Lord" for spiritual Babylon which is coming at the end of the 1260 days prophecy which is pictured for us in Revelation Chapter 19. The downfall of this New Testament Babylon takes place after the pouring out of the sixth bowl or vial upon the great river Euphrates. In Chapter 16, verses 13 and 14 it says, "And I saw three unclean spirits like frogs coming out of the mouth of the dragon, out the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet." "For they are spirits of demons, performing signs, which go out to the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty." At the end of the time of the Millennium there will also eventually come the final day of the Lord, spoken of in 2 Peter 3, verse 10. "But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up." This is the "day of the Lord" that is primarily spoken of in our text in 1 Thessalonians 5. Although verse 3 shows us that the phrase, "the day of the Lord" could also have secondary applications to the "day of the Lord" in 70 A.D. and also the "day of the Lord" which is found in Revelation 16: 14 which can be applied to the fall of Spiritual Babylon at the end of the 1260 days prophecy; we should understand that these cannot be the primary interpretation of the words in 1 Thessalonians 5: 1 because of the previous verses on the resurrection of the dead.

This day of the Lord in 2 Peter 3: 10, the burning up of the present heavens and earth with fire is what will take place shortly after the physical second coming of our Lord, after the resurrection of the dead, and after the last judgment. They will all be consecutive phases of the "the day of the Lord." But this day will come as a thief. It will come stealing in on those who promise themselves peace and safety in their opposition to God and to His Son Jesus Christ. It will come as a thief to steal away for all eternity the hope of the unbeliever and the hope of the hypocrite; the hope that any person will be safe in their sins in the presence of a Holy God. It will be exactly the opposite. Jesus Himself is the thief. He says in Revelation 3: 1-3 to some who were hypocrites in the church at Sardis, "I know your works, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead." "Be watchful, and strengthen

the things which remain, that ready to die, for I have not found your works perfect before God." "Remember therefore how you have received and heard; hold fast and repent." "Therefore if you will not watch, I will come upon you as a thief, and you will not know the hour I will come upon you." You, see Christ can come spiritually for us at any time, really. He can come in judgment to individuals, to churches, to societies, and to the whole world in the time of His appointing. It ought to put us on the watch, and drive us to prayer that we would not be those who are dead and dying spiritually. The "day of the Lord is phrase to describe for us the fact that the Lord does come according to His own appointments, to judge the nations which hinder the advance of the kingdom of heaven. He did so in the Old Testament in regard to punishing the nation of Israel and also the nations that came to destroy Jerusalem and to take them captive. And He does so in the New Testament times in regard to spiritual Babylon and all the nations that will come in persecution against His New Testament Church to prevent her from reigning upon the earth. The next time that I speak to you on this passage I will attempt to open up this truth of the Day of the Lord coming as a thief from Matthew 24 and 25.