

Second Coming

1 Thessalonians 5:1—3

One thing that confuses people, as they read through 1 Thessalonians, is that Paul intermingles speaking of the Rapture with that of the Second Coming. Those who believe the Rapture is the Second Coming will read these verses to depict one event. Those who read carefully, noting important details, will understand the Rapture to be an entirely different event than the Second Coming. This difference becomes quite distinct when the end of chapter four is contrasted with the beginning of chapter five. I believe it is absolutely critical to study these events with the understanding that God's prophetic program for Israel is completely separate and distinct from the program that God has given to today's church.

But...

The very first word Paul uses makes a distinction between the Rapture in Chapter 4 and the Second Coming in chapter five. The dictionary definition states that the word *but* is used to introduce something contrasting with what has already been mentioned. If we were to compress his thoughts into one sentence it would go something like this: "I don't want you to be ignorant about what will happen to us at the Rapture for we will all be caught up to be with the Lord BUT, they will experience the day of the Lord when Christ comes as a thief in the night." If Paul were speaking of the same event, the word *and* would be used to link his last thought with the next. The context demands the word *but* be used.

Times and seasons

Times and seasons are all about the prophetic program for Israel. The Greek word used here for time is *chronos* from which we get our word chronology. This is the arrangement of events or dates in the order of their occurrence. This describes the prophetic program for Israel to a tee. Jesus chided the religious leaders for not being able to read the signs and know what time it was according to the prophetic clock (Matthew 16:3). As Jeremiah 8:7 states, the people did not know about the seasons and their appointed time for the judgment of the Lord because they were not heeding the prophets.

Matthew 24:32—33 shows the relationship between seasons and prophecy. Jesus had just given the Disciples details about what signs they should watch for in the end times. These signs will be used as signposts for those who are going through the Tribulation so they will know when their Messiah will return and set up the Kingdom. Just as they can know what season it is by observing leaves forming on a tree, they will know where they are in the prophetic timeline by watching for signs during the end times. These prophetic events are also directly related to Israel's seven major feasts. Each feast was set at a particular time and in a specific order, and understanding the seasons of the feasts would clue them in to prophetic events in the Old Testament.

You know perfectly

Paul says something very interesting about their knowledge of Israel's end-time events and the Second Coming. He says in verse 1 that they have no need for him to write to them, and then says they know perfectly that the day of the Lord comes as a thief in the night. They had already been taught these things and therefore there was no reason for Paul to reiterate this teaching. However, looking back to 1 Thessalonians 4:13, Paul did need to teach them about the Rapture because he did not want them to be ignorant. This is another indication that there were two bodies of information, one for Israel concerning prophetic events and the other meant specifically for the Church, the Body of Christ. They hadn't heard all the details about the Rapture yet because it was a new teaching revealed to Paul by Jesus Christ but they had heard Old Testament teaching about end-time events.

Day of the Lord

The Day of the Lord is in contrast to the day of man. God has allowed man to have control of the earth and instituted government so that men can rule over mankind. This “time of man” will come to an end when Jesus Christ comes to rule over all creation from His throne in Jerusalem (Isaiah 2:17). According to Joel 3:12—16 the Day of the Lord will happen after the battle of Armageddon which will happen in the valley of Jehoshaphat, also called the valley of decision. As stated in Matthew 24:29—31 the sun will be darkened and the moon will not give its light and the stars will fall immediately after the Tribulation. It’s at this time that the reaper angels are sent out to pull up the tares (unbelievers) to burn them and then gather up the wheat (believers) and bring them into the Kingdom (Matthew 13:24—30; 24:31). Revelation 14:14—20 shows this reaping of the unbelievers and the ensuing bloodshed by the hand of God toward His enemies. This is when Jesus Christ’s enemies are made a footstool and when Jesus Christ is shown standing.

Thief in the night

The phrase *thief in the night* is often used to describe Jesus Christ coming back to catch believers home at the Rapture. The problem is that Jesus Christ does not need to come in the night to steal something that belongs to Him. Instead, This is a picture of what will happen at the end of the Tribulation when Jesus Christ sends His reaper angels out to “steal” what does not belong to Him—the unbelievers. He comes as a thief because they will not be ready for Him and are therefore caught by surprise. They are caught by surprise because they were not looking for the signs but instead were scoffing at those who believe and were waiting for Christ to return (2 Peter 3:3—4).

Peace and safety then sudden destruction

This is what Israel will experience in the early part of the Tribulation. They will feel perfectly safe because of a peace treaty that marks the beginning of the seven-year Tribulation (Daniel 9:27). I believe the battle of Gog of Magog in Ezekiel 38—39 gives insight to events happening in the Tribulation. Israel will be living in a state of security and peace before her enemies attack (Ezekiel 38:11, 14). This attack will happen in the middle of the Tribulation when the antichrist breaks the peace treaty and attacks Jerusalem (Daniel 9:27; Matthew 24:15—21; Luke 21:20—24).

Woman with child

End-time events for Israel are often compared to a woman in labor (Jeremiah 4:31; Micah 4:10; 5:3; Matthew 24:4—8). These birth pangs are an indication of the coming of the Tribulation and are some of the signs that will guide the believers through the Tribulation. These contractions are an indication of the coming of a glorious event, in this case the birth of the nation Israel (Ezekiel 37). Before God sets up Israel as a nation for all eternity, they will experience the birth pangs of the Tribulation. Most think Scripture was fulfilled when Israel became a nation in 1948. However, this was done at the hand of man and there is coming a time when the Jews will be running from Israel as her enemies take over. There is coming a time, at the end of the Tribulation, when God once and for all gathers up believing Israel and makes her a nation that will never be removed from her land.

It should be obvious that the Rapture cannot be the Second Coming. Each has events that are completely separate and distinct from each other. The Rapture belongs exclusively to those who are members of the Church, the Body of Christ while the Second Coming relates to Israel as well as all mankind before Israel was formed. We in the Church are looking forward to a heavenly hope and have no promise that we will be ruling on this earth, while all other saints will be ruling with Christ on this earth.

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