

THE DAY OF THE LORD AND THE RAPTURE*

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THIS ARTICLE EXAMINES THE RELATIONSHIP of the day of the Lord to the rapture of the church and its implications for the longstanding question of the relationship of the rapture to the tribulation. Pretribulationists commonly admit that the Scriptures include no explicit statement on the timing of the rapture with respect to the tribulation. As John Walvoord often noted, this is a matter of inference.¹ However, Paul in his correspondence to the Thessalonians did relate the rapture to the day of the Lord. Depending on the relationship of the day of the Lord to the tribulation, the timing of the rapture in relation to the tribulation can be inferred.

1 THESSALONIANS 4:13–5:11

Both topics, the rapture and the day of the Lord, are clearly addressed in 1 Thessalonians 4–5. First Thessalonians 4:13–18, of

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¹ Walvoord frequently admitted this point in lectures and conversations. This does not mean, however, that the doctrine is weak or unimportant. He put forward a number of exegetical and theological arguments in favor of pretribulationism in *The Rapture Question* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1957) and in *Major Bible Prophecies* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991), 265–304. Exegetical considerations for pretribulationism also appear throughout his work *The Prophecy Knowledge Handbook* (Wheaton, IL: Victor, 1990). He notes, “While it is not as far-reaching in Biblical interpretation as the doctrines of the inspiration of Scripture, the deity of Christ, the substitutionary atonement, or the premillennial interpretation as a whole, one’s decision concerning the character of the tribulation [including the relation of the rapture to the tribulation] is an essential factor in any detailed program of the future. It is significant not only in its own content but in its application of principles of interpretation far beyond the doctrine itself” (*The Rapture Question*, 10).

course, addresses the rapture as an event related to the coming (the παρουσία) of the Lord. This event will include the descent of the Lord, the resurrection of dead believers, and the rapture of living believers together with the resurrected to be with the Lord. Then in 5:1–11 Paul addressed the coming of the day of the Lord. The coming of the Lord and the coming of the day of the Lord are related concepts in a number of texts.² It is not unusual to find the two topics juxtaposed.

Paul's particular concern for the day of the Lord is related to its beginning, its onset. The question is, When will it begin?

Paul posited the question generally in 5:1 as a concern for "the times and seasons,"³ which typically carries an eschatological sense.⁴ In response to the disciples' question, "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel" (Acts 1:6), He said, "It is not for you to know times or seasons [χρόνους ἢ καιρούς] the Father has fixed by his own authority" (v. 7). In the Gospels the timing of the coming kingdom is related to the coming of the Son of Man (Luke 17:20–37), the time of which ("day and hour") is unknown (Matt. 24:36). Paul's opening words in 1 Thessalonians 5 remind his readers of this same tradition about "the times and the seasons" related to the Lord's coming. But he repackaged this teaching about the coming of the Lord and the kingdom under the label, "the day of the Lord" (v. 2), which again points to the interrelatedness of these terms. At the same time he offered a cluster of allusions that form a strong intertextual link to the Olivet Discourse.⁵

Most of these allusions come from the second part of the discourse where Jesus made the point that the day or hour is unknown. These include the metaphor of "a thief in the night" (1

² Zechariah 14:1–5; Malachi 3:1–2; 1 Corinthians 1:7–8; 2 Timothy 4:8; and 2 Peter 3:4–10.

³ Unless indicated otherwise, all Scripture quotations are from the English Standard Version.

⁴ The three uses of the phrase in the Scriptures—Daniel 2:21 (LXX); Acts 1:7; and 1 Thessalonians 5:1—as well as its use in Wisdom 8:9 are all eschatological. In the history of interpretation some have tried to distinguish the terms χρόνος and καιρός. However, most interpreters now agree that the terms are basically synonymous (e.g., Gordon Fee, *The First and Second Letters to the Thessalonians*, New International Commentary on the New Testament [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009], 185–86; and Charles A. Wanamaker, *The Epistles to the Thessalonians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990], 178).

⁵ See Seyoon Kim, "The Jesus Tradition in 1 Thess 4:13–5:11," *New Testament Studies* 48 (April 2002): 225–42.

Thess. 5:2; cf. Matt. 24:43; Luke 12:39–40); the element of “surprise” (1 Thess. 5:4; cf. Matt. 24:43–44, 50); “sudden destruction” when people will be saying “peace and safety” (1 Thess. 5:3; cf. Matt. 23:37–41, 50–51; Mark 13:36; Luke 17:26–37; 21:34); and the admonition to “keep awake” and “be sober” (1 Thess. 5:6, 8; Matt. 24:42, 44, 25:13; Mark 13:33, 35, 37; Luke 21:34, 36). Along with these allusions to the second part of the Olivet Discourse is the metaphor of the beginning of labor pains, found in the first part of the discourse, the metaphor that unites the whole of the first part in a comprehensive image (1 Thess. 5:3; cf. Matt. 24:8; Mark 13:8).

These intertextual links are important. Not only do they establish the fact of Paul’s dependence on Jesus’ express teaching, but they also help show what Paul believed was included in the day of the Lord. In the second article in this series the point was made that the first half of the Olivet Discourse presents a narrative structured as Daniel’s seventieth week but characterized with features typical of the day of the Lord.⁶ The labor metaphor is one of those features, and it operates significantly to unite the whole structure. The second half of the discourse discusses this expanded day-of-the-Lord structure as a whole, addressing the question of when it will come. In this second half the words παρουσία (“coming”) and ἡμέρα (“day”) are used interchangeably in the Synoptic accounts not unlike what is stated in the Old Testament. The exchange gives an expanded sense to the word παρουσία. This is not contrary to its use in the first part of the Olivet Discourse. In fact it is consistent with the imagery of labor and birth that unites that part. By virtue of these intertextual links it is evident that Paul was operating with a notion of the day of the Lord influenced by the Olivet Discourse, which in turn was consistent with the structure of Daniel’s seventieth week.

But there is more. First Thessalonians 5:2–3 focuses on the beginning or onset of the day of the Lord. This is seen, for example, in Paul’s reference to “a thief in the night.” This alludes to Matthew 24:43–44 (cf. Luke 12:39–40).⁷ If the master had known when a thief was coming, he could have been alert and would have prevented the break-in. The concern here is not that of law enforcement—catching the thief in the act of robbery—but rather the concern of the homeowner in preventing the occurrence of a break-in,

⁶ Craig A. Blasing, “The Day of the Lord and the Seventieth Week of Daniel,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 169 (April–June 2012): 131–42.

⁷ Gene L. Green, *The Letters to the Thessalonians*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 232.

that is, preventing the thief from *entering* the home. Paul's reference to sudden destruction when people will be saying "peace and security" (1 Thess. 5:3) parallels the Lord's description of the days of Noah in Matthew 24:37–39. Jesus' emphasis was on the *sudden, unexpected arrival* of the devastating flood followed by its unalterable consequences. But a more explicit parallel to 1 Thessalonians 5:3 is in Luke 21:34–36. The Lord warned that the day would "come upon you suddenly like a trap" (ἐπιστῆ ἔφ' ὑμᾶς αἰφνίδιος, v. 34). Paul used this same language when he described the coming day of the Lord: "sudden destruction will come upon them" (αἰφνίδιος αὐτοῖς ἐφίσταται ὄλεθρος, 1 Thess. 5:3).⁸ The emphasis on suddenness and surprise naturally focuses on the beginning of the action. In Luke 21:35 Jesus said that the day "will come upon all who dwell on the face of the whole earth." The verb ἐπεισεύρομαι ("come upon") conveys the sense of rushing in suddenly or forcibly. The emphasis again is on the onset or arrival of the day. Paul wrote in 1 Thessalonians 5:4 that the day would not "overtake" them "like a thief." "Overtake" translates καταλαμβάνω, which conveys the idea of seizure with hostile intent. The emphasis again is on the outbreak of the action.⁹

These allusions to the second half of the Olivet Discourse focus on the onset or arrival of the day of the Lord, and this is reinforced in 1 Thessalonians 5:3 by Paul's use of the labor metaphor from the first half of the discourse (Matt. 24:8; Mark 13:8).

"Sudden destruction will come upon them as [ὡσπερ, 'in the same way as'] labor pains come upon a pregnant woman" (1 Thess. 5:3). The focus in this metaphor is on the commencement of labor, just as it is in the Olivet Discourse. Paul and Jesus emphasized the commencement of the labor process, not the culmination of that process (the birth itself). This is consistent with the use of the labor metaphor with the day of the Lord in the Old Testament, which

⁸ On the "sudden" nature of the action see Joseph Plevnik, *Paul and the Parousia: An Exegetical and Theological Investigation* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1997), 104–5.

⁹ Douglas Moo contends that the "focus on the 'onset' of the day of the Lord in this passage appears to be, at least, an overemphasis" since "there is nothing in this text to suggest any 'duration' to the day of the Lord" ("A Posttribulation Response," in *The Rapture: Pretribulation, Prewrath, Posttribulation Rapture*, ed. Alan Hultberg [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010], 91). However, this observation seems myopic. Most expositors recognize that Paul was operating with a traditionally informed concept of the day of the Lord. Also interpreters commonly note that the day of the Lord is an extended period of time, although they differ as to its length. Whatever its duration, Paul's reference to the day of the Lord coming on people suddenly draws attention to its onset.

conveys the notion of extended trauma (Isa. 13:8; cf. 21:3; Jer. 48:41; 49:22; Mic. 4:9–10).¹⁰

After mentioning the arrival of the day of the Lord, Paul then noted that this arrival will be different for believers and unbelievers. This can be seen in the alternation of pronouns in 1 Thessalonians 5:1–5.

For believers:

“*You* have no need to have anything written to *you*. For *you* yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night” (vv. 1–2).

For unbelievers:

“While *people* are saying, “There is peace and security!” then sudden destruction will come upon *them* like labor pains . . . and *they* will not escape” (v. 3).

For believers:

“But *you* are not in darkness, brothers, for that day to surprise *you* like a thief. For *you* are all children of the light, children of the day. *We* are not of the night or of the darkness” (vv. 4–5).

Destruction will come on unbelievers. But the day will not seize believers (“you,” “we”) with hostile intent. This distinction culminates in the promise in verses 9–10: “For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep we might live with him.”

Wrath (v. 9), of course, is a well-known aspect of the day of the Lord. One of Paul’s parallel terms for the day of the Lord is “the day of wrath” (Rom. 2:5). This mention of wrath recalls the words of 1 Thessalonians 1:10, “the wrath to come,” and it functions as a

¹⁰ Wanamaker notes the common theme of trauma in the biblical uses of the labor metaphor. However, he also thinks that Paul introduced “a different connotation” in that “he uses it primarily to illustrate the abrupt way in which the day of the Lord will occur” (Wanamaker, *The Epistle to the Thessalonians*, 180). Fee writes that “in many ways this second imagery [the labor metaphor rather than the thief metaphor] is the more fitting, since it emphasizes both the suddenness of the Lord’s coming and the concluding reality that ‘they [the unbelievers] will not escape’ ” (Fee, *The First and Second Letters to the Thessalonians*, 190).

descriptor for the language of 5:3–5, explaining the destruction that will come on “them” (unbelievers). But “we” (believers) are destined for salvation, which fact picks up the expected deliverance mentioned in 1:10 (“delivers us from the wrath to come”), and which clarifies the believers’ experience on the arrival of the day of the Lord (5:4–5).

Both wrath and deliverance are features of the day of the Lord. But the contribution of 5:1–10 is in the way Paul related these two experiences to the onset or arrival of that day.

If the wrath that comes on unbelievers at the onset of the day of the Lord is the wrath that characterizes the day of the Lord as such, how does the salvation from wrath that is provided to believers take place? The answer is given by the intertextual connection of 1 Thessalonians 5:10–11 to 4:14–18. Paul speaks of believers in 1 Thessalonians 5:10 as “we” who may be “awake” or “asleep.” The language of “awake” and “asleep” is used in 5:6 to speak of two moral conditions of believers, who are urged to keep “awake” because they belong to the day. But now in verses 10–11 the wording relates back to 4:15, where Paul wrote that the dead who are “asleep” will be raised at “the coming of the Lord.”¹¹ They and living believers will be “caught up” to meet the Lord and will be with Him forever (4:17). The clause, “we will always be with the Lord” (v. 18) parallels the words “so that we might live with him” (5:10). To “live with Him” refers to the resurrection life believers will receive. The reception of this same life by those at the coming of the Lord is a feature in several Pauline epistles (Rom. 8:11; 1 Cor. 15:15–16; Phil. 3:20–21; Col. 3:3–4). Paul’s words in 1 Thessalonians 4:18, “Therefore comfort one another with these words,” are echoed in 5:11, “Therefore, encourage one another and build up one another, just as you also are doing.”

To summarize, Paul referred to the day of the Lord as informed by Jesus’ teaching in the Olivet Discourse, a day of the Lord that is structured as Daniel’s seventieth week (Dan. 9:24–27). This day of the Lord will commence suddenly like labor pains. No one knows when it will begin, but it will result in wrath for unbelievers and salvation for believers, with the dead believers being raised and the living believers caught up together with them to be with Christ. In other words Paul was teaching a pre- or onset day-of-the-

¹¹ On the relationship of 1 Thessalonians 5:9–10 to 4:15–17 see Fee, *The First and Second Letter to the Thessalonians*, 198–99; Green, *The Letters to the Thessalonians*, 244; and Wanamaker, *The Epistle to the Thessalonians*, 188–89. See also F. F. Bruce, *1 & 2 Thessalonians*, Word Biblical Commentary 45 (Nashville: Nelson, 1982), 113–15.

Lord rapture, with the day of the Lord being an extended event, as seen in Daniel's seventieth week. Stated more succinctly, the rapture is pretribulational.

2 THESSALONIANS 2:1-12

In 2 Thessalonians 2:1-2 Paul used three expressions that form a link to 1 Thessalonians and that are key to understanding biblical eschatology. They are "the coming [παρουσία] of our Lord," "our being gathered together to him," and "the day of the Lord." Paul had used the phrase, "the coming [παρουσία] of the Lord" in 1 Thessalonians 4:15 in discussing the rapture. The παρουσία in that verse includes the Lord's descent and His resurrecting and catching up believers in order to deliver them from the coming wrath. Prior to his use of παρουσία in 2 Thessalonians 2:1, Paul described in 1:7-10 the revelation of the Lord from heaven in glory and judgment. Παρουσία can be used in a narrow as well as an extended sense, the latter being interchangeable with "the day of the Lord." The different tribulational positions agree that παρουσία in its extended sense encompasses both the descent described in 1 Thessalonians 4:16 and the revelation in judgment and glory described in 2 Thessalonians 1:7. But they differ on its length. The descriptions of the Lord's descent in 1 Thessalonians 4:16 and of the revelation in 2 Thessalonians 1:7 are distinct. The only features they have in common are the Lord Himself, the phrase "from heaven," and the fact that saints are involved in both events. How they are connected, of course, differs.

The second phrase in 2 Thessalonians 2:1a, "our being gathered to him," is most certainly a reference to the rapture in which resurrected and living saints will be "caught up together" to "be with the Lord" forever (1 Thess. 4:17).¹²

Both the παρουσία and the rapture relate to the third phrase, "the day of the Lord," so that the discussion that follows regarding the coming of the day of the Lord has implications for both the παρουσία (extended and narrow senses) and the rapture. In 2 Thessalonians 2:1b-2, Paul focused on the day of the Lord, saying, "We ask you, brothers, not to be quickly shaken in mind or alarmed, either by a spirit or a spoken word, or a letter seeming to be from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come."

In the next verse Paul admonished the Thessalonian believers

¹² Bruce, *1 & 2 Thessalonians*, 163; and Fee, *The First and Second Letters to the Thessalonians*, 272.

not to be deceived about this false report regarding the arrival of the day of the Lord. He then discussed features of what is typically called the tribulation. What is not immediately clear is how this recounting is intended to refute the rumor that the day of the Lord had come. Based on the Olivet Discourse and 1 Thessalonians 5, one would anticipate that these “tribulational” features are properly features of the day of the Lord. This is because of the expanded complex structure of the day of the Lord in the Old Testament prophets and the explicit interweaving of features of the day of the Lord in the structure of Daniel’s seventieth week in the Olivet Discourse—the entire pattern being referred to in the second part of the discourse as “that day” (Luke 21:34; see also Matt. 24:36, 42, 50; Mark 13:32).

Paul reviewed the seventieth week structure in 2 Thessalonians 2:3–12 by focusing on the oppressive ruler featured in that pattern. This is understandable since this character and his activity constitute the pattern’s main structural feature.¹³ Paul introduced new terminology regarding this person in calling him “the man of lawlessness” (v. 3), “the son of destruction” (v. 3), and “the lawless one” (v. 8). He speaks of this “man of lawlessness” being “revealed” (vv. 3, 8) and coming with “false signs and wonders” (v. 9), which recalls Jesus’ warning at the beginning of the Olivet Discourse about false christs who will come and lead many astray (Matt. 24:4–5).

Although Paul did not use the phrase “the abomination of desolation,” he spoke of this man of lawlessness taking “his seat in the temple of God” and “proclaiming himself to be God” (2 Thess. 2:4). Elaborating on the description found in Daniel 11:36, Paul wrote that this man of lawlessness “opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God” (2 Thess. 2:4).

His seating himself in the temple will certainly cause the regular temple service to cease and will constitute a desecration. This description seems to develop the Markan version of the Lord’s warning about the abomination of desolation in which Jesus referenced the neuter “abomination” with a masculine participle, saying, “the abomination of desolation standing [masc.] in the holy place where he does not belong (Mark 13:14). Paul continued by saying that the man of lawlessness will come with the power of Satan “and with all wicked deception for those who are perishing” (2 Thess. 2:10). This deception will itself be a judgment from God on

¹³ For an extended excursus on the Antichrist see Bruce, *1 & 2 Thessalonians*, 179–88.

them for their unbelief. This parallels the prophecies about the day of the Lord that speak of His drawing the nations together for judgment (Joel 3:2–3; Zeph. 3:8; Zech. 14:2). In the book of Revelation this coming and gathering of the nations is in response to the Antichrist's deception (Rev. 19:20).

Finally Paul predicted the destruction of the man of lawlessness. He said that "the Lord Jesus will kill him by the breath of his mouth and bring [him] to nothing by the appearance of his [Jesus'] coming" (2 Thess. 2:8). "The appearance of his coming" may be identified with the revelation of the Lord from heaven described in 1:7–10, which will bring the "punishment of eternal destruction" on those who afflict the church with suffering (v. 9). According to Daniel this oppressive ruler will be destroyed by God (Dan. 9:27)—only God can destroy him—in conjunction with the appearance of the Son of Man "on the clouds of heaven" (Matt. 24:30).

The eschatological pattern that Paul set forth in 2 Thessalonians 2 is essentially the same as Daniel's time of the end, which is also the structure in the Olivet Discourse. The only uncertain items in Paul's elaboration of this familiar pattern are the "apostasy" (ἀποστασία, "rebellion," 2 Thess. 2:3) juxtaposed with the revelation of the man of lawlessness and the "restrainer" (v. 6), who will keep the man of lawlessness from appearing and thus the pattern from commencing. Although many suggestions have been offered, no clear contextual bases enable one to identify these features.¹⁴ However, their identity is not crucial to the point being made here. As already argued, in Jesus' teaching the pattern of Daniel's time of the end and the prophetic pattern of the day of the Lord have been integrated into a unified structure. Furthermore it is most likely that Paul referred to this integrated pattern when he used the phrase "the day of the Lord" in 1 Thessalonians 5:2 because of his intertextual connections with the Olivet Discourse. What this means is that it is highly likely that Paul's review of the eschatological pattern in 2 Thessalonians 2 is meant to be taken as a description of the day of the Lord itself. But, if this is so, then how does this description help to refute the rumor that the day of the Lord has come?

Modern translations of 2 Thessalonians 2:3 suggest a different

¹⁴ As Bruce notes regarding the restrainer, the Thessalonians "knew [his identity] because they had been told; later readers are at a disadvantage compared to them, and have to guess" (*1 & 2 Thessalonians*, 170). Pretribulationists commonly see the restrainer as the Holy Spirit in His indwelling the church. See Robert L. Thomas, "2 Thessalonians," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 11 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978), 324–25. On the apostasy see *ibid.*, 321–22.

understanding of Paul's argument. The New American Standard Bible gives a typical translation and also helps show the problem in this verse: "Let no one in any way deceive you, for *it will not come* unless the apostasy comes first and the man of lawlessness is revealed."

Many readers understand by these words that Paul was stating that the apostasy and the appearance of the Antichrist must *precede* the coming of the day of the Lord. The day of the Lord will not come until these events occur first. Certainly this would be a way of dispelling the rumor that the day of the Lord had arrived. But this view requires a radical adjustment of how the day of the Lord is to be understood in relation to the tribulation. It would not be the expanded day of the Lord pattern, structured as Daniel's seventieth week, like that found in the Olivet Discourse, but instead a subevent of Daniel's seventieth week. Furthermore this understanding would create a logical problem with Paul's teaching on the day of the Lord in 1 Thessalonians 5. Paul had already indicated that the day of the Lord will arrive as a sign-less event. It will come like a thief in the night without warning, meaning that it will come without any signs preceding it. Thus it would be wrong to view the day of the Lord as a subevent within Daniel's seventieth week (the tribulation), a period that has signs and is a time of increasing distress and trouble experienced by all people (cf. Luke 21).

The problem is that an ellipsis is present in 2 Thessalonians 2:3. Syntactically the protasis of a protasis/apodosis sentence is missing. The New American Standard Bible highlights the ellipsis and proposes what most translators take to be the missing protasis by the use of italics: *it will not come*.

To make sense of the verse translators have to propose the missing protasis and insert it, as indicated in the New American Standard Bible citation. However, this commonly proposed clause seems to suggest that the day of the Lord is a relatively brief posttribulational judgment event. Is there another way to understand this verse, which keeps it in harmony with the expanded day of the Lord discussion in the Olivet Discourse and which forms the background for Paul's reference to it in 1 Thessalonians 5? If the day of the Lord includes the entire seventieth week, as has been argued in this series, then the elements Paul mentioned belong to the day of the Lord. In that case Paul's argument would be that the day of the Lord had not begun because there was no evidence of its presence. The apostasy, whatever that is, has not occurred, and the man of lawlessness has not been revealed. So the day cannot be here. To underscore this point that the man of lawlessness had not

been revealed, Paul reviewed the man of lawlessness's expected pattern of activity. None of this activity was present. Consequently, the day of the Lord had not come. To clarify the matter, the missing protasis could be rendered something like this: "for *that day does not come* unless the apostasy comes first and the man of lawlessness is revealed."

Robert Thomas called attention to parallel syntax in Mark 3:27 (cf. Matt. 12:29): "But no one can enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man." Here the apodosis is "unless . . . first" (ἐὰν μὴ πρώτου), just as in 2 Thessalonians 2:3, but in Mark 3:27 the protasis is stated. Thomas argued that in this example "actions of the conditional clause [the protasis] are included within the scope of the apodosis."¹⁵ In other words in this example binding the strong man is the first action entailed in entering and plundering the house. For it is likely in this example that the strong man is in the house and thus would first have to be bound.

As an illustration, suppose that someone with advance knowledge that a thief is going to break in and rob a strong man's house is keeping the house under watch. The thought occurs to him that maybe the thief has already entered the house and plundered it. That thought could be refuted if he could see through the window that the strong man is moving about freely in the house; he is not bound up in any way. So the observer is assured that the thief cannot have entered the house and be plundering it, for no one can enter and plunder the strong man's house unless he first binds the strong man. Similarly in 2 Thessalonians 2:3 Paul was arguing that the day of the Lord cannot have occurred, since the apostasy has not happened and the man of lawlessness has not been revealed. Thus the day of the Lord includes the apostasy and the man of lawlessness.

This interpretation brings Paul's instruction in 2 Thessalonians into harmony with 1 Thessalonians.¹⁶ The day of the Lord will come as a thief, suddenly, without warning. But its onset brings about contrasting experiences for believers and unbelievers. Be-

¹⁵ Thomas, "2 Thessalonians," 323 n. 3. Even if a future tense is preferred in the protasis, that in itself does not preclude Paul's mentioning elements that belong to the day of the Lord rather than a listing of conditions prior to its arrival.

¹⁶ Thomas notes, "All this confirms what is necessitated by Paul's viewpoint throughout the rest of these Epistles: the *parousia* for the church and the launching of the day of the Lord can come at any moment. The apostasy and the revelation of the man of lawlessness are not necessary preludes to them, but follow the church's gathering to Christ and lie within the day of the Lord" (ibid.).

lievers will experience deliverance by means of the rapture, and unbelievers will be as if they are caught in a trap with the unfolding consequences of the day of the Lord event-complex. Paul noted in 2 Thessalonians 2:9–17 that unbelievers will be deceived into participating with the man of lawlessness (vv. 10–11), and will be condemned by God. Believers on the other hand are chosen “to obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ” (v. 14). Then Paul reminded them to “hold to the traditions that you were taught by us either by our spoken word or by letter” (v. 15).

The two letters to the Thessalonians must be harmonized. And when they are, they lead to the same conclusion. At the end of Paul’s teaching on the rapture he wrote, “Therefore encourage one another with these words” (1 Thess. 4:18). And this thought is repeated at the end of the rapture-day of the Lord pericope in 5:11, “Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing.” This thought is then stated again in 2 Thessalonians 2:16–17, where Paul wrote of the “comfort and good hope” believers have in Christ.