

The Day of the Lord

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 describes the Rapture, when Christ comes to the clouds above the earth and catches up or raptures all living Christians on the earth to meet Him in the air. But there is something else. I want you to notice that in 1 Thessalonians Chapter 4 Paul talks about the subject of the Rapture. In Chapter 5 he changes topics. This is proven by his use of two little Greek words, *peri de*. These two words in 1 Thessalonians 5:1 could be translated, "But concerning" or "Now about." These two words are used nine times by Paul in 1 Thessalonians and 1 Corinthians. Every time Paul uses these two words, they always denote a change in subject matter. In 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 the subject matter is what happens at the Rapture. But in 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11 he introduces a new subject, a different event, the Day of the Lord. By doing this, Paul indicates that the Day of the Lord and the Rapture are not the same, they are separate events. That is, the events making up the Day of the Lord do not include the Rapture of the Church. But that's not all.

There are other reasons Paul gives why the events making up the Day of the Lord do not include the Rapture of the Church. What are they? We know from Zechariah 12 and 14 that the events making up the Day of the Lord include the nations gathering against Israel, great cosmic judgments that God brings, and the Day of the Lord ends with the Second Coming of Christ. But Paul tells Christians that they will not be overtaken by this Day of the Lord, that they are not a part of that day. Where does he say this? In 1 Thessalonians 5:4 he says, "But you, brethren, are not in darkness, that the Day should overtake you like a thief." Also, in verse 9 Paul tells them why they won't experience any part of the coming Day of the Lord. He says, "For God has not destined us for wrath but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ." The Rapture is not part of the Day of the Lord, and takes place before it starts. How do we know this?

Paul told the Thessalonians in 1 Thessalonians 5:2, "For you yourselves have accurate [or perfect] knowledge about the day of the Lord." In other words, Paul is saying he had already given them full, exact information about the events that would happen during the Day of the Lord.

But it's interesting that even though they had perfect, accurate knowledge about the Day of the Lord, they were ignorant about the Rapture. In 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, Paul tells them he does not want them to remain ignorant about the Rapture. Well, if they had perfect or accurate knowledge about the Day of the Lord but they were ignorant about the Rapture, then the Rapture must not be a part of the Day of the Lord or they would have known about it. So first, Paul writes about the Rapture in 1 Thessalonians 4, then he changes topics and writes Chapter 5 to calm their fears about the Day of the Lord. In doing so, he indicates that the Rapture of the Church will take place before the Day of the Lord starts. Since the Rapture is not part of the Day of the Lord, and since the Day of the Lord concludes with Christ's returning to earth in judgment, the two events, the Rapture and the Second Coming, must be separate events.

Now I want to add a little more evidence from Scripture concerning the fact that at the Rapture Christ comes before the Tribulation and at the Second Coming He comes after the Tribulation. Look at Matthew Chapter 24, a clear Second Coming passage. The verses in this chapter clearly teach that Jesus will come to earth after the Tribulation to conquer, judge, and begin ruling. In Matthew Chapter 24 Jesus begins His description of the events leading up to His Second Coming by listing the following. First, he talks about the appearance of false messiahs who will mislead many. Then He says, "Nation will rise against nation and kingdom against kingdom; in various places there will be famines and earthquakes." After that, He says, "But all these are merely the beginning of birth pangs." In the Old Testament the phrase "birth pangs" is used in many places and is a common metaphor that is associated with God's wrathful judgments.

In addition, many times the Old Testament Scriptures reveal that God's wrath is brought through human means, such as war. In Isaiah 26:20 you can see that birth pangs are clearly associated with God's judgment and wrath. Further, in the Old Testament the phrase "birth pangs" is used in describing the fear and pain associated with the future time of Jacob's Trouble which will come upon Israel (Jer. 30:6,7). Here in Matthew 24 Jesus uses this phrase, "birth pangs," to describe the appearances of false messiahs, nation against nation, famines and earthquakes. But He says these terrible events are only the "beginning of birth pangs."

Then, Jesus teaches that these beginning birth pangs happen before the midpoint of the Tribulation. How do we know that? It's because after He describes the events He calls the beginning of birth pangs, a few verses later, in verse 15, He says, "When you see the abomination of desolation which was spoken of through Daniel the prophet.... Then let those in Judea flee to the mountains." According to Daniel 9:27, the abomination of desolation by the Antichrist will happen at the midpoint of the Tribulation, or at the three and a half year point of Daniel's Seventieth Week. But notice, the beginning of birth pangs happens before the midpoint of the Tribulation, the abomination of desolation. Obviously if certain events are described as the beginning of birth pangs, they imply further, more serious, more intense, more painful birth pangs will follow. And that's exactly what we have here in Matthew 24. After Jesus speaks of the abomination of desolation, the midpoint of the Tribulation, in verse 21 He says, "Then [after the abomination of desolation] there will be a great tribulation, such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever shall." From these words I take it that He is saying that the Great Tribulation occurs after the abomination of desolation and lasts the next three and a half years. During this time, the more intense birth pangs will fall upon the earth. Then finally, after the events making up the Great Tribulation, the last 3-1/2 years of Daniel's Seventieth Week, Jesus' Second Coming to earth takes place. We read, "But immediately after the tribulation of those days, they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky with power and great glory."

So the order here in Matthew 24 is that first you'll have the events that Jesus labels the beginning of birth pangs and tribulation; then will come the abomination of desolation, followed by the Great Tribulation, and finally at the end of the Great Tribulation Jesus returns to earth. But this order of events seems to contradict what the Bible teaches in the Rapture passages such as Revelation 3:10, 1 Thessalonians 1:10, 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 and 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11 which suggest Jesus will come before the Tribulation ever starts. The only way these different passages can be harmonized is to conclude that the Bible is teaching the Rapture is a separate event from the Second Coming of Christ to earth.

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