

THE COMING & THE DAY OF THE LORD IN PAUL'S LETTERS TO THE THESSALONIANS

Observations

1. Throughout the early chapters of 1 Thessalonians, Paul refers repeatedly to the coming of the Lord (1:9-10; 2:14-16; 2:19-20; 3:11-13), which the Thessalonians are apparently to expect soon, or even recognize is already happening, and yet also stretches to the very End, and which includes both salvation for them and judgment for their enemies.
2. 1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:11 is clearly one long continuous instruction about fundamentally the same subject: the coming of the Lord, and the Day of the Lord, which are two different terms for the same event, clearly connected to the resurrection of Christ's people (which was the "presenting issue" for the Thessalonians).
3. Paul's predictions of Christ's coming and the Resurrection of his people in 1 Thessalonians 4 clearly echo what he says in 1 Corinthians 15. Both these passages are clearly about the Resurrection Day.
4. Paul's practical admonitions in 1 Thessalonians 5 clearly echo what Jesus says in the Olivet Discourse, recounted in Matthew 24, Mark 13, and Luke 21, which is clearly about the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple and the end of the Old Covenant age.
5. In 2 Thessalonians 1 Paul promises the Thessalonians that Christ will soon come and destroy the Apostate Jewish enemies who are persecuting them
6. In 2 Thessalonians 2 Paul warns that that cannot happen until the coming of a Man of Lawlessness.

Tensions

How can all these things possibly fit together?

Solutions

1. The Old Testament repeatedly describes God as coming to judge. However, with the judgment he also came to save.
 - a. Sometimes he is described as coming personally and visibly.
 - i. He is described as personally coming to the Garden to confront Adam and Eve and cast them out.
 - ii. He is described as personally shutting Noah in the Ark, before unleashing the fiercest judgment so far in human history.
 - iii. He is described as personally coming down to the Tower of Babel to judge the builders.
 - iv. He is described as personally coming down to warn Abraham that he was about to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah.
 - v. He is described as hearing the cries of his people in Egypt and personally coming down to charge Moses to go and set them free
 - b. Other times, especially in the Prophets, he is described as coming in devastating events that are happening—especially in disastrous defeats at the hands of human armies acting as the unwitting agents of God's judgment. Each of these events was conceived as the Day of the LORD, when he came to judge:

Nation	Text	Description
Egypt	Isaiah 19	Yahweh comes on a cloud against Egypt
Babylon	Isaiah 13	The Day of the LORD comes through the Medes
Edom	Isaiah 34	The Day of the LORD against Edom
Israel	Micah 1:3–6	The LORD comes down against Samaria
Judah	Joel 2, Isaiah 29, Micah 3, etc.	The Day of the LORD against Jerusalem

2. Long ago, Jesus Christ, the Son of Man and the Son of God, came to save and to rule and to judge, and many knew the time was near.
 - a. 2000 years ago, he came down from heaven to earth to live and die and rise again for our salvation. This was far more than just a personal and visible coming. This was the Incarnation. During his ministry, he consistently identified himself as the Son of Man described in Daniel 7.
 - b. 40 days after his resurrection, he came up from the earth to heaven to be enthroned at the Father's right hand, ascending through the clouds as his Apostles watched from the Mount of Olives. This was the coming of Daniel's Son of Man with clouds up to the throne of the Ancient of Days.
 - c. 40 years after that, he came judicially to put an end to the Old Covenant world. This was the public proof that he, Jesus of Nazareth and Daniel's Son of Man, had been enthroned in heaven. This coming was also just the most recent of several "Day of the LORD" events across OT history, delineated above. As the Lord Jesus had predicted, the coming of HIS Day of Judgment happened to the same generation that saw his crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension. Also as he predicted, no one knew the day or the hour in advance, but his disciples, alert and watching, were able to escape the devastation before it arrived.
3. At the End, Jesus Christ, the Son of man and the Son of God, will come again to save and to judge and to rule. No one knows the day or the hour of this great and final Day of the LORD, so Christians are called to stay ready. The final climax will include:
 - a. The Return of Christ in glory
 - b. The Resurrection of the Just and Unjust
 - c. The Reckoning at the Judgment Seat of Christ
 - d. The Rest of God's people forever

Paul professed that he did not know if he or indeed any of the Thessalonians would be among the believers still alive at that Day (1 Thessalonians 5:10)