

Section Three: The Kingdom of God on Earth (Future)

Category B: Second Coming – Kingdom Intelligence Report #2

Topic: The Phases

The New Testament teaches that there will be two phases for the Second Coming; each occurring at opposite ends of the Tribulation. Phase One will consist of the Rapture. Phase Two will be our Lord's literal, physical return to earth; bringing the Tribulation period to a climactic end. It is important for us to understand the distinction that exists between these two phases of the coming of our Lord, in order to avoid any confusion surrounding the four-fold purpose of Phase Two. The potential for misunderstanding is real, as indicated by the concern that developed among the Christians in Thessalonica, revealed to us in 2 Thessalonians 2:1-2 –

“Now we request you, brethren, with regard to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, that you not be quickly shaken from your composure or be disturbed either by a spirit or a message or a letter as if from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come.”

Paul is dealing with a demonic distortion of what he taught the Thessalonians in his first epistle, regarding Phase One. That falsehood created no small measure of distress among these sincere believers. Why? Because this highly misleading message declared that “the day of the Lord” had come. They understood from previous teaching by Paul that the Rapture would remove the Church from earth, initiating the Tribulation and “the day of the Lord.” If Paul had taught them that they would be participants in “the day of the Lord,” at least in part, then why would this teaching have upset them? Common sense tells us the opposite. However, Paul's instruction was that they would not experience the Tribulation, nor “the day of the Lord,” at all; but be raptured away, prior to its onset. So in being told that “the day of the Lord” had come, in direct contradiction to apostolic teaching, this certainly would have caused them concern. This is why an all-important distinction is made in the New Testament between “the day of the Lord” and “the day of Christ.” The former is never used in reference to Phase One of the Second Coming, while the latter is never used in reference to Phase Two.

The following linguistic distinction between an **event** and a **period**, should help in giving us some clarity. The “day of Christ” refers to the “event” of the Rapture, fulfilling Phase One. The “day of the Lord” initiates a lengthy “period” of time, beginning with the Tribulation, including Phase Two of the Second Coming and extending beyond Christ's return for the completion of Plan A. Paul's previous teaching in **1 Thessalonians 5:1-11** was for the express purpose of establishing this dichotomy in the minds of the Thessalonian Christians. He reminds them, first, that “the day of the Lord” would be a time of destruction from which no one would escape (5:2-3). But then he reassures them that they would not be overtaken by it (5:4). Why? **“For God has not destined us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ”** (5:9). If the “wrath” is the Tribulation, then we can also view the “salvation” as the Rapture. This interpretation of “wrath” and “salvation” is confirmed by the strong connection which exists between Paul's conclusion in 1 Thessalonians 5:9 and his introductory affirmation in 1 Thessalonians 1:10.

More in Appendix A on this issue, which will be posted next.