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## Leading Thoughts on Eschatology in the Epistles to the Thessalonians

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grace? Moreover, the sinner who has been pardoned is best fitted, psychologically, to become the mouthpiece of the God of grace. Do not criticize the wisdom of God's choice! Briefly, "whoever says that the Spirit of God cannot convert again the fallen Christian and cannot produce noble thoughts in him, knows nothing either of Christian theology or of psychology." (*Lehre und Wehre*, 1913, p. 216.) This objection is so preposterous that the *Neue Luth. Kztg*, No. 10, 1901, dismisses it in one sentence: "Weil Petrus einen sittlichen Irrtum begangen habe, koenne er nicht von intellektuellen Irrtuemern frei gewesen sein: das ist eine sehr voreilige Schlussfolgerung. Doch das sei fuer diesmal genug."

Dr. Pieper: "None of us, even though he were a doctor in all four faculties, can deny the inspiration of Holy Scripture without suffering an impairment of his natural mental powers. . . . All opposition to the divine truth, and that includes the opposition to the *satisfactio vicaria* and to the inspiration of Scripture (verbal inspiration), is, as can be clearly shown, irrational." (*Op. cit.*, I, pp. 280, 614.)

(To be continued)

TH. ENGELDER

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### Leading Thoughts on Eschatology in the Epistles to the Thessalonians

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In the autumn of 52 A. D. or somewhat earlier, while on his second great missionary journey, Paul, accompanied by Silas, paid his first visit to Thessalonica. Acts 17.

Being favorably situated on the Aegean Sea, Thessalonica was at that time the largest city of the Balkan Peninsula and one of the most important cities of the Roman Empire, vying with Rome and Alexandria for commercial supremacy. The population of Thessalonica must have exceeded 100,000. Many Jews lived there. It was just the place for Paul to undertake extensive missionary activity.

Paul remained in Thessalonica at least three weeks. But in that short time he gathered a large congregation. The nucleus included a limited number of Jews but a large number of Greeks, many of whom had attended the synagog previously. Among the latter were not a few women of considerable means.

Paul's early departure from Thessalonica was not of his own choosing. The majority of the unbelieving Jews stirred up the populace against the missionaries to such an extent as to make it necessary for them to remain in seclusion. When Paul and Silas could not be found, their host Jason and several other newly converted Christians were brought before the civil author-

ities, being released only when sufficient bond was posted. Following that incident Paul and Silas left the city and moved on.

Because of the precarious situation in which the congregation found itself, Paul cherished the wish and the intention to return at an early date. However, he was prevented from doing so, likely because of the continued enmity of the Jews and Gentiles. Instead, Paul sent his pupil Timothy to Thessalonica to cheer and strengthen the congregation in its tribulations. 1 Thess. 3:1-3.

The various reports which Timothy brought to Paul at Corinth induced the latter to write his first letter to the congregation at Thessalonica, probably 53 A. D., or even as early as 51 A. D., 1 Thess. 3:6; Acts 18:1.

The Epistle rings with thanksgiving. For, despite the pressure on all sides, the congregation had remained faithful to God and to His servants, and their faith and Christianity had become known and had elicited praise far and wide. Gratefully and without reservations the apostle acknowledges that fact in the first three chapters.

In the last two chapters he strives to correct certain deficiencies in the understanding and the behavior of the Thessalonians. He warns against immorality to which the heathen surroundings and the seaport atmosphere constantly exposed the Christians. He cautions against greed and dishonesty in business and industry, which prevailed on every hand, Thessalonica being a commercial center. Above all, however, he instructs them with regard to eschatology. We may gather from his letter that the members gave much thought to the early return of the Lord and the end of the world, so much so that in many cases the duties of daily life were neglected and many gave way to idleness and restlessness. Others thought that such as died prior to the return of Christ would not enter at once into glory, as would be the case with those whom Christ's return would find still living. Hence, the death of loved ones called forth inordinate grief. Finally, others busied themselves with speculations about the times and conditions preceding the end of the world. Paul clears up all these matters, in part by references to what he had told them orally, in part by a new presentation.

Even so, not all errors were corrected by the First Epistle. That appears from the fact that shortly afterwards, probably before the end of that year and while Paul is still in Corinth, he writes a second letter to the Thessalonians, in form and content quite similar to the first. Expressions of gratitude for the faith and love of the congregation find a place also in this Epistle. However, the leading subject is a discussion of the Lord's return.

Moreover, the congregation is warned against the erroneous belief that the Lord's return would be immediate or had already occurred. The renewal of severe persecutions had probably led to that erroneous view. Prophetic voices from the midst of the congregation had announced the beginning of the end of the world and thus had occasioned much unrest. Some had gone so far as to write letters in Paul's name, hoping thus to induce people to accept the contents of such letters. Against all this the apostle now sets forth that the Lord will not return before the Antichrist will be revealed. He appeals to all to heed his words. Those who are in need of it are to be admonished to return to a normal and industrious way of living.

Thus the importance of the two Epistles to the Thessalonians has been indicated—their importance with reference to eschatology. We might list and summarize the various statements the apostle makes concerning eschatology as follows:

1. The Lord will return, and that suddenly, as a thief in the night.
2. The Lord, however, will not return before the great Antichrist shall have been revealed.
3. The Lord will come for vengeance upon the unbelievers but for the glorification of believers.
4. The return of the Lord will include various steps: (a) Jesus will appear in glory. (b) The dead in Christ will arise. (c) Christians still living, together with those called back to life, will be caught up in the clouds. (d) Both will ever be with the Lord.
5. The teaching of the Lord's return should strengthen our faith, foster holy living, caution us against error, comfort us in tribulation, and confirm us in our hope.

#### I

That the Lord will return is stressed in four sections of the two letters, each being distinctly eschatological in content. These four sections shall engage our attention especially, *viz.*, 4:13-18 and 5:1-11 in the First Epistle; 1:3-10 and 2:1-12 in the Second Epistle. At the same time we dare not overlook the fact that the other chapters likewise move in the field of eschatology. Hardly one thought is developed without touching on that subject. Both Epistles, from beginning to end, center around eschatology. A striking example is the conclusion of the first chapter of the First Epistle. There Paul states how everywhere people were talking about the welcome extended to the apostles by the Thessalonians and how the latter were turned from strange gods. Then he mentions God's objective in converting them: "to serve the living and

true God"; and immediately he adds, "to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us *from the wrath to come.*" 1:10.

In the second chapter Paul first presents a vivid review of his ministry in Thessalonica and then reminds his readers that one object of that ministry had been to charge them, literally "adjure" them, to "walk worthy of God, who hath called you *unto His kingdom and glory,*" v. 12. He continues to speak of how the Thessalonians received the Word in faith, how, by suffering persecution, they had become his companions and companions of his coworkers, how earnestly he had desired to visit them again, and then he finally exclaims: "For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at *His coming?*" V. 19.

Similarly the third chapter, concluding the first part of the Epistle, voices his earnest concern and his fervent prayers for their spiritual well-being, and ends with the wish: "The Lord make you to increase and abound in love one toward another and toward all men, even as we do toward you: To the end He may establish your hearts unblamable in holiness before God, even our Father, at the *coming of our Lord Jesus Christ* with all His saints." Vv. 12, 13.

In the fourth and fifth chapters Paul sets forth at length the facts concerning Christ's return and shows how Christians should prepare for it. Then he concludes the entire Epistle with the wish and prayer: "The very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless *unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ,*" 5:23.

All this is eschatological language, in which the term "parusia" occurs again and again, a term which has been taken over into the language of the Church. The term originally means "presence," then the appearance and presence of a coming one, specifically of Him, Christ, who will come from heaven.

We find the same stressing of eschatological thoughts in the Second Epistle. Beginning in the first chapter with praising the congregation for their patient, faithful endurance of tribulations, the chapter ends with a lengthy reference to the *final judgment*, when God will visit tribulations upon the persecutors of the congregation but will give rest to those remaining faithful despite tribulation. Vv. 5-10.

In the second chapter the apostle discusses in detail the *time* of the "parusia," making special mention of the great falling away at the time of the Antichrist. The section closes with the wish and prayer: "Now, our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and God, even our Father, which hath loved us, and hath given us *everlasting conso-*

*lation and good hope through grace, comfort your hearts and establish you in every good word and work."* Vv. 16, 17.

The eschatological tone and tendency of the two Epistles to the Thessalonians (the oldest of Paul's epistles with the possible exception of Galatians) is worthy of note and important also for us Christians of the twentieth century. The apostle regarded the second coming of Christ not as of secondary importance, merely to be touched upon now and then, but as of primary importance. In his preaching and teaching he comes back to that doctrine again and again. He finds in it a mighty incentive to lead a holy life and an inexhaustible source of comfort in tribulation. The two Epistles show clearly that the subject of the latter days was spoken of at such great length not merely because the question concerning Christ's second coming had been raised and for that reason erroneous views had to be guarded against, but that Paul treated that subject regularly in his preaching. For example, in chapter 2, verse 5, of the Second Epistle, while he is in the midst of an eschatological discussion, he asks his readers: "Remember ye not, that, when I was yet with you, I told you these things?" In the fifth chapter of the First Epistle he tells his readers: "But of the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you. For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night," vv. 1, 2. What opportunity had they had to know these things other than his oral instructions during his brief sojourn in their city?

Accordingly, the clause "From thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead" has from the very first found a place in the shortest and the oldest confessional statement of the Church, the Apostles' Creed, which we still confess Sunday after Sunday.

Likewise, the Church-year. The Epistles and Gospels for the last Sundays of the Trinity season as well as those during Advent point to the end of this world's existence. Yes, at the very midway point of the Church-year, Ascension, Pentecost, we are reminded of the "parusia" of the Lord. At the Ascension of Jesus the two angels tell the disciples, "This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go into heaven." Acts 1:11. The Epistle for Pentecost brings us the sermon of Peter and in it the Old Testament prophecy of Joel and the New Testament fulfilment of the same, in which it is declared that the great miracle of Pentecost, the outpouring of the Holy Ghost, is the last great act of God "before that great and notable day of the Lord come." Acts 2:20. Between Ascension and Pentecost we have the Epistle for the Sunday called "Exaudi." The various admonitions of that Epistle are an elaboration of the statement: "The end of all things is at hand." 1 Pet. 4:7.

This part of our Creed — the statement concerning the return of our Lord — is unique in this, that it can be traced back to the earliest times and is found to have undergone virtually no change, as has been shown by Th. Zahn in his *Das Apostolische Symbolum* (p. 78) and by other scholars. Cf. 1 Tim. 6:14; 2 Tim. 4:1; 1 Pet. 4:5; Acts 10:42; Polycarp's *Letter to the Philippians*, chap. 2, v. 1; *The Epistle of Barnabas*, chap. 7, v. 2; Clement of Rome, *Second Letter to the Corinthians*, chap. 1, v. 1; even the author of the gnostic *Acts of Peter* uses the phrase *Iudex vivorum atque mortuorum*. We may go so far as to say that the article of faith concerning the second coming of Christ is one of the oldest dogmas and that in the various schisms this dogma was never the cause for controversy.

A study of eschatology in the light of the Epistles to the Thessalonians is, therefore, very profitable. In the final analysis we may say that the whole Christian religion is eschatologically bent. Luther reminds us that Christ has redeemed us not from fire and water but from eternal wrath. Other writings of the New Testament, besides the Thessalonian epistles, call our attention to the latter days. For example, in 1 Cor. 1:7, 8, after Paul had enumerated the spiritual gifts God had granted His Church, he closes by saying that the Corinthian Christians now wait for only one more event, namely, "for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ," to which he adds, "Who shall also confirm you unto the end, that ye may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ." 1 Cor. 1:8. In the Epistle to the Philippians Paul says concerning himself and the Philippian Christians: "For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto His glorious body, according to the working whereby He is able even to subdue all things unto Himself." Phil. 3:20, 21. Cp. also Rom. 2:5-10; 8:17-23; 14:7-9; 1 Cor. 4:5; 6:2, 3; 15:12-57; 2 Cor. 5:1-10; Gal. 6:7-9; Phil. 3:10, 11; 4:5; Col. 3:4; 1 Tim. 6:14-16; 2 Tim. 2:10-13; 4:6-8; Heb. 10:25-27; Acts 17:31; 24:25. In our personal life we are so apt to forget the things emphasized in these passages. In funeral sermons often too much is said about a blessed death and too little about eternal life. Also in this matter we can learn something from Scripture, which has little to say about the interim between death and resurrection but a great deal about the blessed eternity. Of course, it would be going too far, as some Lutheran theologians have done, to treat eschatology as the center of Christianity. Some preachers have gone to that extreme; in every sermon, even at Christmas time, they touched upon the subject of the end of the world. They maintain the view that the doctrines of redemption and justification were disposed of at the time of the Reformation, that now eschatology should have its day. However,

it is a mistake to contrast redemption and eschatology with each other in that way. Whoever, in looking back, will center his view on the redemptive work of Christ will also, in looking ahead, center his view on eternal life.

And now the first leading thought which Paul discusses in the letters under consideration: *The day of the Lord will come, and that unexpectedly and suddenly, as a thief in the night.*

Here the words of 1 Thess. 5:1-3 come into consideration. Let us examine these words. In the foregoing verses, chap. 4:13-18, Paul had answered the first eschatological question that had been raised, namely, what the lot of those would be who would have died prior to Christ's return. To that he now adds the reminder that the return of Christ will be sudden and unexpected, climaxing this reminder with the admonition to be prepared at all times. In v. 1 he says: "*But of the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you.*" By "times and seasons" Paul, of course, means the time and the hour of the return of Christ. He uses the same two expressions, "times and seasons," which are used elsewhere in connection with the return of Christ. For example, when just before the ascension of Jesus the disciples asked: "Lord, wilt Thou at this time restore the kingdom of Israel?" Jesus answered: "It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, χρόνους ἢ καιροὺς, which the Father hath put in His own power." Acts 1:6, 7. The two expressions, "times and seasons," are easily distinguished in the Greek, for "time" expresses duration (*Zeitstrecke, Stunde*), while "season" expresses a point in time (*Zeitmass, Zeitpunkt*). In both cases the plural is used, "times and seasons," since, according to Scripture and the presentation of the apostle, the "parusia" will be carried out in particular acts and events. 2 Thess. 3-10; 1 Thess. 4:15-17. Even as the disciples at the time of the Lord's ascension, so also the Thessalonians would have liked to know in greater detail just how long a time would intervene, χρόνοι, and just what periods of time were involved, καιροί. Just from this passage we see again that the question concerning the "parusia" was the subject of much discussion in the congregation. From the words of the apostle we may even conclude that the Thessalonians had expressed the wish to hear more from their teacher concerning these matters. Note the περί, chaps. 4:9 and 5:1 and compare for such use of περί 1 Cor. 7:1; 8:1; 12:1. But Paul replies that they are in no need of such knowledge. Very briefly he reminds them of what is to be said on that subject without actually telling them anything new. For what he had told them orally when he had been present with them in Thessalonica was fully adequate. After all, he himself did not know the exact "when" of the "parusia." Acts 1:7; Mark 13:32. He was unable to give them either the extent of time that would



transpire before the Lord's return, χρόνοι, or the number of "time-periods," "seasons," that would have to occur, καιροί. He wants to say, it is not necessary that I write to you further concerning that matter. You yourselves are informed, you are not in need of further explanation on my part, you know "perfectly," ἀκριβῶς οἴσασθε, you well know that it is impossible to know the exact "when" of the "parusia." We may know only the "how."

In order to make the whole matter clear and vivid to his readers, he makes use of a figure which the Lord Himself had used: "*The day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night.*" V. 2. Cf. Matt. 24:36-51; 25:1-13; Mark 13:32-37; Luke 12:35-46; 17:22-37; 21:34-36. By "day of the Lord" he means, of course, the "parusia" of the Lord. In the foregoing he has repeatedly referred to it. He means the so-called "last day," when the Lord will reveal Himself and will return to this world visibly and in glory to judge the living and the dead, to destroy this world and to consummate His kingdom. The expression originates in the Old Testament, הַיּוֹם הַהוּא. In the writings of the prophets the word appears frequently to designate the judgment day of God. That is particularly the case in the writings of Isaiah, Amos, Joel, and Zephaniah. Since this Lord and Jehovah whose "day" is announced so often is Christ, since all judgment has been committed to the Son, John 5:2-23; Acts 17:31, it is appropriate to call this day the day of Jesus or the day of Christ or the day of Jesus Christ. 2 Thess. 2:2; Phil. 1:6, 10; 2:16; 1 Cor. 1:8; 5:5. This day will come as a thief in the night. By comparing it with a thief the suddenness, the unexpectedness, the terribleness of the coming is emphasized as well as the hazardousness and the fatality of it. They upon whom the Last Day will come unawares will lose everything which they have possessed hitherto. A thief comes like that. He comes at a time when no one expects him, at night, when people sleep; then he robs what is in the house. Also this expression, "as a thief," is found already in the Old Testament portrayal of Judgment Day, Obad. 5; Joel 2:9; Jer. 49:9, and is later used especially by Christ in this connection. Twice the Lord says in his eschatological discourses: "If the good-man of the house had known in what watch the thief would come, he would have watched and would not have suffered his house to be broken up. Therefore be ye ready also; for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh." Likewise he makes the statement twice in the book of Revelation: "Behold, he cometh as a thief." Cf. Matt. 24:33; Luke 12:39; Rev. 2:2; 16:15.

The passage under consideration, taken in connection with the parable of the Ten Virgins, caused the ancient Church to conclude that Christ would come at night, more specifically the night before Easter, even as the first Passover and the departure from Egypt

took place at night. Thus originated the so-called vigils (watch services), since the Church was desirous of being found awake when the Lord would come. Especially solemn was the so-called Easter Vigil.

In vivid and dramatic words Paul continues: "*For when they shall say, Peace and safety, then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape.*" V. 3. The Thessalonians were to ask no further questions concerning "times and seasons" but rather were to be truly watchful, so that the day of the Lord would not take them by surprise as a thief. The Lord's coming will mean destruction for the secure and unfaithful. Such persons will say: "Peace and safety" and will act accordingly. They will eat and drink, they will marry and will be given in marriage, they will buy and sell, they will plant and build. Matt. 24:38, 39; Luke 17:26-28. But in the midst of their security, in the midst of their daily activities, destruction will suddenly come upon them. The literal meaning is: destruction will come upon them "unforeseen" (αἰφνίδιος, related to ἀφανής), so that they will not suspect it in the least, will have no indication of it in advance. The suddenness, the unexpectedness of the coming, is expressed also in the verb which Paul uses, destruction "cometh upon them." Luther translates ἐπίσταται, "ueberfaellt sie," "tritt an sie heran," "steps up to them." Moreover, the destruction referred to will be equivalent to ruin and decay in the fullest sense of the word. To drive home this fact to his readers, Paul uses another comparison, which likewise is used repeatedly in the Scriptures. The destruction will come upon the secure and the unfaithful "as travail upon a woman with child." The point of comparison is the uncertainty and the suddenness of the pains. And the apostle concludes: positively "they shall not escape," οὐ μὴ ἐκφύωσιν.

The contents of these three verses is and remains of the greatest importance. It is foolish and presumptuous to say anything more about the times and the seasons of Christ's return; least of all should any one undertake to set the exact date. (Bengel, Adventists, Russellites or Jehovah's Witnesses). All such efforts, in ancient as well as modern times, have failed. At the same time, in view of the clear words of Scripture regarding the uncertainty of the time of the "parusia," it is grievous and sinful levity ever to become secure and unconcerned and to think or to say: "My Lord delayeth His coming." Matt. 24:28.

The prophets of the Old Testament direct our attention again and again to the Day of the Lord. One of the longest sermons of Christ which has come down to us is his so-called eschatological discourse, in which He points out the certainty of His return and the uncertainty of the hour as well as further details in connection

with His "parusia" and how to be prepared for the same. Matt. 24 and 25; Mark 13; Luke 17 and 21. The apostles follow His lead when they say as with one voice: "The Lord is at hand"—thus St. Paul, Phil. 4:5; "The Judge standeth before the door"—thus St. James, chapter 5:8, 9; "It is the last time"—thus St. John, 1 John 2:18; "The end of all things is at hand"—thus St. Peter, 1 Pet. 4:7; "Behold, the Lord cometh"—thus St. Jude, v. 14. The last page of the Bible brings us once more the words of the true and faithful witness: "Surely, I come quickly," Rev. 22:20. Yet how easily the things of the present cause us to forget about the future and the end! How easily we forget that the day of the Lord will come as a snare upon all who live upon the earth! How sluggish we are in seeing to it that we be constantly prepared! For that reason it is impossible to remind ourselves too earnestly and too emphatically: *The Lord will come again, and that suddenly, as a thief in the night.*

This article as well as the succeeding ones, was written in German. For certain reasons it is here given in English. Pastor Rudolph Prange of Little Rock, Ark., has kindly done it into English at my request, which is hereby acknowledged with sincere thanks. L. FUEBRINGER

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## Notes on the History of Chiliasm

### Introduction

Amid the international upheavals and universal catastrophes we can expect a large-scale revival of chiliastic teachings. Chiliasm arose among a "have-not" people; it usually enjoyed a wide acceptance when nations had been disappointed economically and become unsound theologically; and whenever confessionism was at low ebb, emotionalism was substituted for the Scriptural teaching on eschatology. The time for a new assault by the forces of chiliasm is ripe. Therewith also the time for a restudy of the history of chiliasm has come.

### 1. Origin

Since the official publications of our Synod have repeatedly and at great length shown that chiliastic opinions are neither taught nor tolerated in Holy Scriptures, we shall in this article dispense with a negative approach and immediately ask, Whence did the Jews (vid. Augustana, Art. XVII) receive the suggestion of chiliastic doctrines, the revealed Scriptures of the Old Testament being eliminated as a source?

In a general way we may answer that the heart of natural man is inclined toward chiliasm. The desire for a heaven upon