

Sudden Destruction as Travail Upon a Woman with Child



David Wilkerson May 2, 1988

"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. 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" (1 Thessalonians 5:1-3).

The judgments of God strike suddenly, but not without warning. God promised He would do nothing, including sending judgment, without telling His prophets what was coming. "Surely the Lord God will do nothing, [unless] He revealeth His secret unto His servants the prophets. The lion hath roared, who will not fear? The Lord God hath spoken, who can but prophesy?" (Amos 3:7-8). God promises that a trumpet will be sounded, God will roar like a lion, to awaken the people prior to judgment. "And the Lord shall be seen over them, and His arrow shall go forth as the lightning: and the Lord God shall blow the trumpet..." (Zechariah 9:14).

"The great day of the Lord is near, it is near, and hasteth greatly, even the voice of the day of the Lord: the mighty man shall cry there bitterly. That day is a day of wrath, a day of trouble and distress, a day of wasteness and desolation, a day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness, a day of the trumpet and alarm against the fenced cities, and against the high towers. And I will bring distress upon men, that they shall walk like blind men, because they have sinned against the Lord: and their blood shall be poured out as dust, and their flesh as the dung. Neither their silver nor their gold shall be able to deliver them in the day of the Lord's wrath; but the whole land shall be devoured by the fire of His jealousy: for he shall make even a speedy riddance of all them that dwell in the land" (Zephaniah 1:14-18).

Here is a prophesy of a sudden destruction by fire, a day of distress and great trouble — darkness and gloominess! But it is also "a day of the trumpet and alarm"! Hosea 8:1 says, "Set the trumpet to thy mouth." This was the verse God gave me when I wrote the book of that title. Trumpet means the voice of warning. The Lord says in Ezekiel 33:2-4, "...When I bring the sword upon a land, if the people of the land take a man of their coasts, and set him for their watchman: if when he seeth the sword come upon the land, he blow the trumpet, and warn the people; then whosoever heareth the sound of the trumpet, and taketh not warning; if the sword come, and take him away, his blood shall be upon his own head."

God blows the trumpet through the voice of His watchmen and prophets. The trump is a reverberating blast, a warning. Paul warned, "Behold, I shew you a mystery; we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed" (1 Corinthians 15:51-52). "At the last trump" suggests there were other trumpet blasts. I do believe there will be angelic trumpets heralding His coming. But I also believe this means that just prior to that change which will come "in the twinkling of an eye," the Holy Spirit will have all His watchmen at their posts, all seeing eye to eye, all giving forth the last call — the final warning! Within hours or seconds, the sudden change will come.

Noah sounded the last trump to his doomed society in the second month on the seventeenth day. God pinpoints the very day! For one-hundred twenty years the trumpet was to his lips, warning, pleading. Then, on the night of the sixteenth, in the second month, God shut him and his family in the ark, letting him know — "Tonight is the last trump!"

Tomorrow, Mother Earth brings forth judgment!" It came on the seventeenth of the month! "In the six hundredth year of Noah's life, in the second month, the seventeenth day of the month, the same day were all the fountains of the great deep broken up, and the windows of heaven were opened" (Genesis 7:11).

No wonder Paul wrote these words to the church at Thessalonica, "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" (1 Thessalonians 5:1-2). Why should it be perfectly clear to them that God's Day of Judgment will come suddenly? The church in Thessalonica was about six months old when this letter was received. Paul probably, with Silvanus and Timothy, preached about Noah and Lot and the sudden destruction of Israel. They had all the same Old Testament examples we have. They had the prophets. This letter was written in either 52 or 53 A.D. They were less than twenty years away from the destruction of Jerusalem, as prophesied by Jesus! Paul is saying: it is perfectly clear that God's judgments fall suddenly, like a thief in the night! Yet, no believer should ever be surprised — that day should not overtake God's people unawares. We should know how God works, because we have His record. Paul proceeds to warn them what it will be like just before judgment strikes and how to act in such an hour.

The Day of Judgment Will Come When Society Becomes Obsessed With Prosperity and Security.

"For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them..." (1 Thessalonians 5:3). The Greek word Paul uses for peace is "eirene" which implies prosperity. The Greek word for safety is better interpreted as "security." Sudden destruction is about to break forth in that day when men's minds are focused on riches. Money madness! Greed! Accumulating! Hoarding! Jesus warned us it will be a time when men's hearts would fail them for fear, watching the terrible things coming upon the earth. Men will yearn for something certain, something secure. It does not say it will be a time of peace and safety, only that they will say, "Peace and safety." It will be all they talk about. Their conversation will be about money, things, investments, how to find a secure haven for their assets!

Never in world history have men become so driven by a quest for money. Prosperity is the American dream! The stock market has become one gigantic gambling casino. Millions of Americans play numbers, the lottery, hoping to get rich overnight. Why such obsession to make it big? Because everyone knows a storm is coming! The entire world awaits with anxiety that one day when a financial meltdown hits. They are trying to secure themselves against that awful time, hoping to outride the storm.

The obsession for prosperity has even corrupted the church. How Paul would have grieved had he known a day would come when ministers of the Gospel would turn Christ's covenant into a covenant of cash! The church once stood before the world as a testimony against greed and materialism, against the love of things, against self-love, against hoarding and covetousness. But now the world sees the church as its biggest competitor for the good life! The world laughs and mocks at Christians who reject the sufferings of Christ and Paul to indulge in the riches of this age.

Judgment on God's House — Then All of Society

Sudden destruction can mean more than a hydrogen holocaust. By one sudden event, one single catastrophe, the American dream can become a horrible nightmare. The judgment that has so suddenly fallen upon God's house will fall on the nation. The church woke up one day to a horrible scandal. We blushed to hear that a preacher of the Gospel spent millions of dollars on fancy cars, jewelry, luxury homes, expensive wines! The ungodly laughed and mocked, and the name of Jesus became the butt of jokes and satire. Jesus became the song of drunkards! Then again, in one hour, one newscast, the whole world was told the nation's number one sin preacher was caught in sin! In Times Square Church I heard God's people scream and groan, crying out, "Please say it isn't so!" And now we watch the awesome stripping of some ministries. Amidst it all, these awesome words ring so true: "For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God..." (1 Peter 4:17).

Why are we shocked? We've been warning the wicked that judgment is at the door, and it must begin in God's house. God is willing to let His name be mocked just to wake up the church and give one last trump to the world. "...And if it begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God? And if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?" (1 Peter 4:17-18). God's judgments in His house are so sudden and frightful, men's ears tingle when they hear of it! When God judged the house of Eli, He said, "...I will do

a thing in Israel, at which both the ears of every one that heareth it shall tingle...I will judge his house forever for the iniquity which he knoweth..." (1 Samuel 3:11-13). When God judged Israel and the house of Manasseh for corruption, He said, "...I am bringing such evil upon Jerusalem and Judah, that whosoever heareth of it, both his ears shall tingle" (2 Kings 21:12). God told Jeremiah that such awesome judgments were soon to fall on the house of Israel, "...that whosoever heareth, his ears shall tingle" (Jeremiah 19:3). To tingle the ears in Hebrew meant, "to rattle their ears and make them red with shame." Even the wicked will have blushing ears!

If God will rattle the ears of this nation by what they see and hear of His judgment upon the church, what kind of sudden, fearful judgments will fall upon this society? The media of this nation has delighted in making sport of religion. They have made the nation distrust all holiness preaching, making all ministers out to be charlatans and crooks! Barrooms are abuzz. They lift their drinks to toast, laughing, "Here's to all hell-fire preachers!" But they had better get the most mileage they can out of it because it's all going to change overnight! God will tingle the ears of the world now because society is next — American is next — our government is next — our financial institutions are next! Wall Street is going to be "Wailing Street." The word destruction as used here refers to ruin, death. Sudden ruin! Sudden death! The judgment in God's house is God firing a warning shot over the bow of the ship of state. Soon He will call for a direct hit! Men will not want to hear — they will try to cover their ears. The news will be so unbelievable! So shocking!

Sudden Destruction Will Come as Travail Upon a Woman With Child.

This is God's inspired Word; and every word was chosen carefully. Destruction is coming suddenly as the birth pangs of a woman about to deliver a child. The woman here is a lost, wicked, godless society — and a monster is about to be birthed. Judgment comes out of her very own womb! As surely as an expectant woman cannot hide her pregnancy, the impending judgments should be obvious to all. A woman has nine months preparation! Judgments are going to come like birth pangs, labor pains. When the moment of birth draws near the labor pains begin to increase both in number and intensity. They can be an hour apart, then half an hour, then ten minutes apart. She is taken to a hospital, and the pains keep increasing. Suddenly, constant labor pains! Travail! Its spiritual application is that the final destruction will begin with painful warnings which will intensify and become accelerated.

I believe America is already ambulatory — headed for the labor room! Didn't the ears of the whole world tingle when America's spaceship blew up in the heavens? The world watched in horror as five astronauts plunged helplessly to earth! A warning labor pain! Then close to that pain, another: hundreds of American marines were suddenly destroyed in Lebanon, without a warning! We stood by, helpless! A plane went down near Iceland, killing a plane-load of American soldiers headed home. We watched our President's tears flow! AIDS is declared a plague upon America by alarmed doctors. The projections of its spread are terrifying! Drugs have exploded upon our society — another plague. An engineer high on drugs caused a tragic train wreck. Drug abuse is spreading like the black plague of past centuries. Gangs now roam New York, Los Angeles, Chicago — killing, robbing, mugging: slaves to drugs at 15 years of age! Did the ears of all mankind tingle when our stock market nearly went into meltdown! I was there that October day. The New York Daily News headline screamed, "Panic — Dow Plunges Through Floor 508 Points!" Paul warns us that it is all going to intensify, to accelerate. God is now quickening the pace of troubles and sorrows.

The Holy Spirit is also blowing the trumpet louder. The trumpet is sounding more clearly, more ominously. Never have we heard so many warnings. Never have there been more watchmen crying from the wall. In fact, there have been so many warnings that many of God's people have turned a deaf ear! Society is in travail — judgment is breaking out — and they are turning to idols and toys! Jesus did say we are to rejoice when we see all these things coming to pass because it means our redemption is near. But who are these who can rejoice on the brink of destruction?

It's a Time to Watch and Be Sober

God is calling His people to watch and be sober as the day of destruction nears. "Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober" (1 Thessalonians 5:6). Paul exhorts the brethren, "Ye...are not [in] darkness...Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness" (1 Thessalonians 5:4-5). What he is saying is this: "What is to this world a tragic night of darkness and destruction is the dawning of a new day to you who watch and are sober. This day of darkness and fiery judgment has nothing to do with us!" As surely as we are not of this world, we are not destined for darkness and destruction, "for God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Thessalonians 5:9).

As the labor pains increase it means something glorious to Christ's bride! It is one crisis closer to home! It is their countdown to destruction; it is our countdown to glory! It is their appointment with wrath; it is our appointment with resurrection! They will weep and gnash their teeth; we will rejoice and shout for joy! Those who are the children of this gross darkness, this night of destruction, are drunken and asleep: "For they that sleep, sleep in the night; and they that be drunken are drunken in the night" (1 Thessalonians 5:7). "Let us, who are of the day, be sober..." (v. 8). This has to do with any kind of earthly intoxication. "To intoxicate" means "to excite the human spirit to a high-fever pitch." This is a powerful warning to us from the apostle Paul. He warned us not to get excited over earthly things on the eve of destruction — not to become intoxicated, high, over anything but Christ!

We must occupy until He comes. We must be diligent and provide well for our households — and in all things do our best as unto Him. But, above all else, we must be sober and watchful. The word "sober" here means "discreet, discerning, cautious." In other words, don't let anything take your heart. Be watchful that you do not get too involved, too excited, or too wrapped up in things of this life. "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: whom resist stedfast in the faith..." (1 Peter 5:8-9).

Watch out! Be warned! You may right now be drinking the devil's wine of distraction — the wine of busyness. The Bible warns that Satan will attempt to deceive, if it were possible, even the elect. I have often wondered how that could be possible. Not by adultery, fornication, pride, evil habits — but by letting something good, something worthwhile take the heart — by using what is legitimate to obsess the heart and consume all one's time.

According to Scripture, God's people are to earnestly desire this fiery day of sudden destruction. "But the day of the Lord will come as thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up. Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness, looking for an hasting [longing for] unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness. Wherefore, beloved, SEEING THAT YE LOOK FOR SUCH THINGS, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless. Ye therefore, beloved, seeing ye know these things before, beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own stedfastness" (2 Peter 3:10-14,17). We are to earnestly look for that day of burning — because this old sin-cursed earth must be purged to bring on our new heaven and earth, where His righteousness dwells.

A Time to Be Stirred

This is not a time to be settling down to a life of ease. This is not a time to be at ease in Zion. We must live in a stirred-up state. "And it shall come to pass at that time [before judgment] that I will search Jerusalem with candles, and punish the men that are settled on their lees: that say in their heart, The Lord will not do good, neither will He do evil" (Zephaniah 1:12). "Settled on their lees" means unconcerned. "Lees" are sediment of wine settled at the bottom of the barrel. Many Christians have not wanted Holy Ghost stirrings; they now sit back, take it easy, and let all the dirt settle in their hearts. Some have left Times Square Church because it is too intense — there is too much stirring up of the heart. The lees [the sediment, dregs] keep floating to the top. They have gone on, looking for a place where there is no stirring. They say, "I can't take the pressure, the strong preaching. Too much heart-searching — too much pricking of the conscience."

I say to you, a true Holy Ghost church will be the candle of God, searching through the city, making it very uncomfortable for those who have settled down. God's Word calls it being "emptied from vessel to vessel" in Jeremiah 48:11. "Moab hath been at ease from his youth, and he hath settled on his lees, and hath not been emptied from vessel to vessel: therefore his taste remained in him, and his scent is not changed." These people refused to get involved. They preferred quiet, peace, and undisturbed prosperity — they refused to be probed, convicted, or stirred.

If we knew how close we were to our Lord's return — how close to fiery judgments, we would thank God for His stirrings in us. We would be poured out in every meeting, getting rid of the dregs. We would thank God for ministers of the Gospel who keep provoking us to walk in righteousness and who flood our souls with the convicting, piercing Word of truth. On Judgment Day, we will be eternally grateful to God for being awakened by the trumpet messages which brought us to repentance and the true fear of God.

If you are walking in the Spirit, you are having Jesus Christ lay the ax to every root that ties you to this earth. "Now also the axe is laid unto the root" (Luke 3:9). This was a powerful prophetic utterance by John the Baptist. He saw the destruction of Jerusalem just ahead. Israel's days were numbered — God would cut them off! But, it is also a picture of the last day Christian pulling up roots.

My bags are packed! I'm ready; I'm longing to see Jesus face to face. I'm being weaned from this world. It's an everyday battle to resist mammon in this materialistic society, but all of this world must become to us as dung. Paul was so right.

How wonderful to know we need not fear the dreadful days of wrath and indignation that are just ahead. Live or die, we are the Lord's. Sudden destruction is surely coming upon the wicked; but sudden glory awaits the overcomers.

There is not a time to be flirting with some hidden sin. It is not a time to be lounging for hours in front of TV, wasting precious hours that ought to be spent in prayer and devotion.

The trumpet of God is blowing — loudly and clearly. We are without excuse, and we will soon be startled by the swift, ominous outbreaks of terror, disasters, and troubles — worldwide. Those who know the Lord and are walking in His righteousness will not be afraid. They will be on the frontlines of the spiritual battlefield — overcoming all the principalities and powers of darkness through intercessory prayer.

We'd better believe it and get our hearts prepared — **CHANGES ARE COMING — UNBELIEVABLE CHANGES.** Sudden and ruinous! But also, in the twinkling of an eye — God's people will be changed — from mortal to immortal.

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