

Day of the Lord Project—Lesson 3

The DOTL Comes as a Thief in the Night

The Basic Objection

- We have already seen in these studies that the DOTL is a prophesied event and that there are certain manifest signs that precede its coming.
- One common objection to the view that the DOTL comes to earth at the Second Coming and not before is that the DOTL must come as a thief in the night (1Thessalonians 5:2) and not have signs that precede its coming.
- If the DOTL includes the tribulation, then the DOTL can come unexpectedly because the timing of the Catching is unknown. However, if the DOTL begins at the Second Coming, some wonder how it can come as a thief in the night since there are obvious signs that precede the Second Coming (Joel 2:31).
 - Dwight Pentecost makes this exact argument, and for this reason, he rejects the view that the DOTL comes at the Second Coming. (Things to Come, pp. 230-31)
 - The word “rapture” does not appear in the Scriptures. The Catching term is derived from 1 Thessalonians 4:17.
 - Biblical terms include catching up, adoption, and day of redemption.
- Put another way, how can the DOTL come as a thief in the night at the Second Coming when it is obvious that the Second Coming is seven years after the beginning of Daniel’s 70th week and 3.5 years after the abomination of desolation is set up?

The Solution

- Matthew 24:43-44—shows that it is prophetic information that the DOTL comes as a thief in the night.
 - Therefore, whatever causes the DOTL to come as a thief in the night cannot be connected to the mystery program (e.g., the Catching) or else the Lord Jesus Christ revealed the mystery’s existence in Matthew 24.
 - Someone who is not a mid-Acts dispensationalist, such as Pentecost, might feel comfortable with the view that the Catching is what causes the DOTL to come as a thief in the night. However, a mid-Acts dispensationalist should think carefully about making this argument as it denies the essence of mid-Acts dispensationalism, i.e., that the mystery was hid until revealed to Paul (1 Cor. 15:51).
- The dispensational point of view is not simply that the Old Testament does not discuss the mystery. Rather, it is that the Old Testament does not even indirectly hint at the dispensation of grace’s existence, which was hid in God (Eph. 3:9).

- If the DOTL is the presence of the Lord (Zeph. 1:7), then the Lord's absence would be night.
 - Thus, the entire tribulation period is a time of night.
 - 1 Thessalonians 5:4-5—the body of Christ will not be in darkness that the day will overtake it as a thief.
 - Notice that the DOTL comes as a thief IN the night, not as soon as it turns night. If thieves always came as soon as it turned night, they would lose the element of surprise. A thief comes at an unspecified time in the night.
- The relevant verses about the Lord's coming indicate that it is not possible to know the day or the hour. One can know the year and possibly the month.
 - Zechariah 14:7
 - Matthew 24:36—day and hour
 - Matthew 24:39
 - Matthew 24:42—hour
 - Matthew 24:43—what watch (Mark 13:35, Matt. 14:25 – night has four watches)
 - Matthew 24:44—hour
 - Matthew 24:50—day, hour
 - Matthew 25:13—day, hour
 - Mark 13:32—day, hour
 - Luke 12:39-40—hour
 - Luke 12:46—day, hour
 - Revelation 3:3—hour
- It is not a surprise as a general matter that thieves come in the night. The issue of coming as a thief is the particular hour. Information that a thief will break in during the next three years is not actionable because it does not permit planning. Similarly, the vast majority of covert intelligence involves non-specific threats of harm, which are thus not actionable.
- It is impossible to know the exact timing of the DOTL because its timing is not specified in scripture, but it occurs sometime after the 70th week and after the sun is turned to darkness and the moon to blood (Matt. 24:29-31).
- The entire tribulation is night time, but the DOTL is in particular described as a time of darkness.
 - Amos 5:18-20—the DOTL is darkness, very dark, not light, and has no brightness.
 - Zephaniah 1:15-16,18—the DOTL is a day of darkness and gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness.
 - Joel 2:1-2—the DOTL is a day of darkness and of gloominess, a day of clouds and thick darkness.
- Christ comes as a thief in the night because the sun is turned to darkness, the moon ceases its shining, and the stars of heaven fall.

- Christ comes as a thief in the night because he returns at some unspecified time “AFTER the tribulation of those days” (Matt. 24:29).
- Jesus Christ comes as a thief in the night because he turns out the lights in the universe prior to returning.