



Thoughts from First Thessalonians ...

Wrath upon God's Opposition

The only reason this world exists is so that God can call from the nations of earth a special people for the sake of His name. When there is no one left who will answer the call, then God's plan is finished on earth and He will destroy the physical universe. Jesus Himself said, during the years of His earthly sojourn, "I have come to cast fire upon the earth; and I wish it were already kindled!" (Luke 12:49). But the time was not yet at hand, and, nearly 2000 years later, if anyone is still reading this, the time is still not yet at hand. "The Lord is not slow about His promise," commented Peter, "as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9). This is making it clear that God

will hold off the day of judgment until every last person who will repent can be converted.

- ▼ **Jewish hostility** — Jesus had anticipated, as He explained at different times and different ways, the hostility the Jews would develop toward the gospel. "They will make you outcasts from the synagogue," the Lord had explained to the apostles, "but an hour is coming for everyone who kills you to think that he is offering service to God" (John 16:2). They were the ones who, as Paul put it, "both killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drove us out." They were misguided in their understanding, as Paul explained to the brethren in Rome, "For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not in accordance with knowledge" (Romans 10:2). Because they did not understand, or would not understand, their zeal turned dangerous. "They are not pleasing to God, but hostile to all men."
- ▼ **Getting in the way** — Their hostility was so deeply ingrained that they not only rejected the gospel as it applied to them, and persecuted those who tried to preach to them, but they were also "hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles, that they may be saved" (1 Thessalonians 2:16). God's obvious goal is the salvation of the Gentiles, who can only be saved if they are able to hear and then obey the word of God. So when these men were blocking the progress of the gospel, they were in fact major barriers in the plan and purpose of God. And He wasn't happy!
- ▼ **Fill up the measure** — When Jesus rode over the crest of the Mount of Olives and overlooked Jerusalem, He wept over the city because of their rejection of Him as their Messiah and Savior. The culpability, He said, of all the righteous blood shed on earth would fall on that generation. "Fill up," He emphasized, "then, the measure of the guilt of your fathers" (Matthew 23:32). Similar language was used by Paul in describing the end of those Jews who hindered the early preachers from getting the gospel to the Gentiles. "The result," he commented, of such conduct, is "that they always fill up the measure of their sins" (1 Thessalonians 2:16).

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The scripture consistently pictures the ultimate destruction which will come upon those who are not obedient to the gospel of peace. But those who oppose the preaching of the word of God seem to get a hotter spot in the fires of hell. As Paul spoke of those Jews who tried to block the spread of the word of God to the Gentiles, he used this terminology: "But wrath has come upon them to the utmost." They will, as Revelation pictures it, say to the mountains and the rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the presence of Him who sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb; for the great day of their wrath has come; and who is able to stand?" (Revelation 6:16,17). But they won't be able to run, and they can't hide!!

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