Excursus #1

The Doctrine of Imminence

- An **excursus** is "a detailed discussion or digression to investigate and explain a particular point or topic." In other words, an academic "rabbit trail." The purpose of this excursus is to explain the theological significance of **the doctrine of imminence**.

- The English word **"imminent"** comes from the Latin verbs *"immineo* and *imminere*," which mean ""to overhang" or "project." The English word means, "hanging over one's head, ready to befall or overtake one; close at hand." Thus, an imminent event is one that is always hanging overhead, constantly ready to befall or overtake a person. In imminent event is one that is always close at hand in the sense that it could happen at any moment.

The Christian doctrine of imminence defined

- The Christian doctrine of imminence is the belief in the imminent coming of the Lord. As He has revealed in Scripture, the coming of the Lord is an event that is always "hanging overhead," constantly read to befall or overtake us, and is always close at hand in the sense that it can happen at any moment.

What is the relationship between the believer and imminence?

- We learn from the books of Daniel, Revelation and others that God will inflict His great wrath upon the earth in judgment for its wickedness and unbelief. But we also learn from Scripture that before God inflicts His wrath upon the earth that Jesus Christ will come down from heaven and take all believers, alive and dead, to be with Him. This event is known as "the Rapture." It is the Rapture of the church that is the imminent event that we are looking for.

Scriptural support for the doctrine of imminence

1 Corinthians 1:7— so that you are not lacking in any gift, awaiting eagerly the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ,

1 Corinthians 4:5— Therefore do not go on passing judgment before the time, but wait until the Lord comes who will both bring to light the things hidden in the darkness and disclose the motives of men's hearts; and then each man's praise will come to him from God.

- The context of 1 Corinthians 4:5 is Paul's instruction regarding **the Judgment Seat of Christ**, found in 1 Corinthians 3:8—4:5; 2 Corinthians 5:10 and Romans 14:10-12.

1 Corinthians 15:51-52-- 51 Behold, I tell you a mystery; we will not all sleep, but we will all be changed, 52 in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed.

1 Corinthians 16:22— If anyone does not love the Lord, he is to be accursed. Maranatha.

- In this verse the key word is the final word . . . ***Maranatha***.

- The word ***Maranatha*** is translated from an Aramaic phrase. The Aramaic word *Mar* means "Lord," the word *an* means "our," and the word *tha* means "come."

- Literally the word ***Maranatha*** means "Lord our come" . . . or, **"our Lord come."**

- This Aramaic word in a Greek letter to a Greek congregation became a "watchword" or "password" to the early church. It summed up the vital hope of the early church as Christians whispered it to one another. It was one way that Christians were able to identify one another because it was a phrase from a language that was not known among the Gentiles.

Philippians 3:20— For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ;

- The word ***wait*** emphasizes the intense yearning for the *Parousia*, meaning "look for." The *Parousia* is the term that refers to the return of Christ which every Christian "looks for."

- Paul's use of the plural pronoun, ***we***, emphasizes the fact that every Christian should live with the hope in the Lord's soon coming.

Philippians 4:5— Let your gentle spirit be known to all men. The Lord is near.

1 Thessalonians 1:10— and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, that is Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath to come.

- The word that is translated ***wait for*** is the Greek word *anamenō*. This word is from the two Greek word, *ana* and *menō* and found only here in the New Testament.

  - The word *ana* means, "repeatedly, with intensity." The word *menō* means "to remain."

  - Thus, the word *anamenō* is a word that speaks of "intensely and continuously remaining in a state of watchfulness."

Titus 2:13— looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus,

1 John 2:28— Now, little children, abide in Him, so that when He appears, we may have confidence and not shrink away from Him in shame at His coming.

Revelation 3:11; 22:7, 12, 20— I am coming quickly.

Revelation 22:17— The Spirit and the bride say, "Come." And let the one who hears say, "Come." And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who wishes take the water of life without cost.

- The word ***come*** is in the **imperative mood**, indicating that the Holy Spirit and the church were so eager for Christ to come that they commanded Him to fulfill His promise to **come quickly**.

- Charles Spurgeon writes, "Beloved, so live from day to day in duty and in devotion that your Lord's come would be timely. Go about your daily business and abide in Him and then His coming will be a glorious delight to you."

What is the relationship between the unbeliever and imminence?

- For the unbelieving world, the coming of the Lord for His bride will signal the beginning of their judgment as the events of the Tribulation begin. And for the unbelieving world, they will enter into a period of judgment that comes suddenly upon them, without warning (see Matt. 24:37-44; Matt. 25:10, 13; Luke 12:39-47; 1 Thess. 5:3).

What words or phrases denote the time in which God comes in judgment?

- There are several phrases in Scripture that are synonymous with the time of God's ultimate judgment.
    - In 1 Thessalonians 5:2-3 the phrase that is used is ***the day of the Lord***.
    - In Daniel 9:24-27 the phrase that is used is **"Daniel's 70th week."**
    - In Isaiah 26:20-21 the phrase used is **God's *indignation***.
    - In Jeremiah 30:6-7 is it called ***the time of Jacob's trouble***.
    - In Matthew 24:21 & 29 it is called ***tribulation***.
    - In Revelation 3:10 it is called ***the hour of testing***.

In Revelation 3:3 the Lord warns, *I will come like a thief*. What is this warning in reference to?

- In the context of His warning to the church in Sardis, which had grown complacent in its tolerance of sin and to whom the Lord declares in Revelation 3:1, ***I know your deeds, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are [spiritually] dead.***
    - Therefore, in the context of the Lord's warning, His statement in v. 3 that ***I will come like a thief*** is a reference to **impending judgment** . . . specifically, the impending judgment of **the day of the Lord**.

The Day of the Lord

- We see references to ***the day of the Lord*** in several New Testament passages. In 1 Thessalonians 5:1-2 and 2 Peter 3:10 we see the two, ***the day of the Lord*** and ***a thief in the night***, used together…

    1 Thessalonians 5:1-2— 1 Now as to the times and the epochs, brethren, you have no need of anything to be written to you. 2 For you yourselves know full well that the day of the Lord will come just like a thief in the night.

    2 Peter 3:10— But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up.

What is meant by the phrase *"the day of the Lord"*?

- The term ***the day of the Lord*** refers to God's special intervention into the course of world events to judge His enemies, accomplish His purpose for history and thereby demonstrate who He is . . . **the sovereign God of the universe**.

- For evidence of what God <u>has done</u> and <u>will do</u> during this time of judgment, we get a glimpse of God's previous judgments and their purpose in the Old Testament . . .

  Isaiah 2:10-22— *10* ***Enter the rock and hide in the dust from the terror of the LORD and from the splendor of His majesty.*** *11* ***The proud look of man will be abased and the loftiness of man will be humbled, and the LORD alone will be exalted in that day.*** *12* ***For the LORD of hosts will have a day of reckoning against everyone who is proud and lofty and against everyone who is lifted up, that he may be abased.*** *13* ***And it will be against all the cedars of Lebanon that are lofty and lifted up, against all the oaks of Bashan,*** *14* ***against all the lofty mountains, against all the hills that are lifted up,*** *15* ***against every high tower, against every fortified wall,*** *16* ***against all the ships of Tarshish and against all the beautiful craft.*** *17* ***The pride of man will be humbled and the loftiness of men will be abased; and the LORD alone will be exalted in that day,*** *18* ***but the idols will completely vanish.*** *19* ***Men will go into caves of the rocks and into holes of the ground before the terror of the LORD and the splendor of His majesty, when He arises to make the earth tremble.*** *20* ***In that day men will cast away to the moles and the bats their idols of silver and their idols of gold, which they made for themselves to worship,*** *21* ***in order to go into the caverns of the rocks and the clefts of the cliffs before the terror of the LORD and the splendor of His majesty, when He arises to make the earth tremble.*** *22* ***Stop regarding man, whose breath of life is in his nostrils; for why should he be esteemed?***

  Ezekiel 13— *9* ***"So My hand will be against the prophets who see false visions and utter lying divinations. They will have no place in the council of My people, nor will they be written down in the register of the house of Israel, nor will they enter the land of Israel, that you may know that I am the Lord GOD.*** *9* ***"So I will tear down the wall which you plastered over with whitewash and bring it down to the ground, so that its foundation is laid bare; and when it falls, you will be consumed in its midst. And you will know that I am the LORD.*** *21* ***"I will also tear off your veils and deliver My people from your hands, and they will no longer be in your hands to be hunted; and you will know that I am the LORD . . .*** *23* ***therefore, you women will no longer see false visions or practice divination, and I will deliver My people out of your hand. Thus you will know that I am the LORD."***

  Ezekiel 30:3, 8, 19, 25-26— *3* ***"For the day is near, Even the day of the LORD is near; it will be a day of clouds, a time of doom for the nations.*** *8* ***"And they will know that I am the LORD, when I set a fire in Egypt and all her helpers are broken.*** *19* ***"Thus I will execute judgments on Egypt, and they will know that I am the LORD."*** *25* ***'Thus I will strengthen the arms of the king of Babylon, but the arms of Pharaoh will fall. Then they will know that I am the LORD, when I put My sword into the hand of the king of Babylon and he stretches it out against the land of Egypt.*** *26* ***'When I scatter the Egyptians among the nations and disperse them among the lands, then they will know that I am the LORD.'"***

  - From the Isaiah and Ezekiel passages cited above we learn that God has previously judged idolatrous Israel, evil Egypt and Babylon. From the context of Isaiah 2:1 we learn that the near fulfillment of this woe is intended for Israel and Jerusalem. **But this judgment is only a foreshadowing of the even greater judgment revealed in Revelation**.

- There have been several **"days of the Lord"** in the past in which God executed His judgment:
  - Assyria was raised up by God to judge the Northern Kingdom of Israel around 722 B.C.
  - Babylon was raised up by God in 605 B.C. to judge the Southern Kingdom of Judah.
  - God then raised up Babylon to judge Egypt and its allies during the 500s B.C.
  - God raised up the Medo-Persian Empire to judge the Babylonian Empire during the 500s B.C.
- The Scriptures also teach of a **<u>future</u>** ***day of the Lord***.
  - The Isaiah 2:10-22 cited above is actually fulfilled in Revelation 6:12-17.
  - Isaiah 34:1-8 also describe the future judgment of God in Revelation:

    Isaiah 34:1-8— 1 Draw near, O nations, to hear; and listen, O peoples! Let the earth and all it contains hear, and the world and all that springs from it. 2 For the LORD'S indignation is against all the nations, And His wrath against all their armies; He has utterly destroyed them, He has given them over to slaughter. 3 So their slain will be thrown out, and their corpses will give off their stench, and the mountains will be drenched with their blood. 4 And all the host of heaven will wear away, and the sky will be rolled up like a scroll; all their hosts will also wither away as a leaf withers from the vine, or as one withers from the fig tree. 5 For My sword is satiated in heaven, behold it shall descend for judgment upon Edom and upon the people whom I have devoted to destruction. 6 The sword of the LORD is filled with blood, it is sated with fat, with the blood of lambs and goats, with the fat of the kidneys of rams. For the LORD has a sacrifice in Bozrah and a great slaughter in the land of Edom. 7 Wild oxen will also fall with them and young bulls with strong ones; thus their land will be soaked with blood, and their dust become greasy with fat. 8 For the LORD has a day of vengeance, a year of recompense for the cause of Zion.

    Obadiah 15— "For the day of the LORD draws near on all the nations. As you have done, it will be done to you. Your dealings will return on your own head.

  - Joel 3:1-16 and Zechariah 14:1-3, 12-15 refer to the gathering of the armies of the earth at Armageddon, which is the 6th bowl judgment of God, revealed in Revelation 16:12-16 and Revelation 19:11-21.

What encompasses *"the day of the Lord"*?

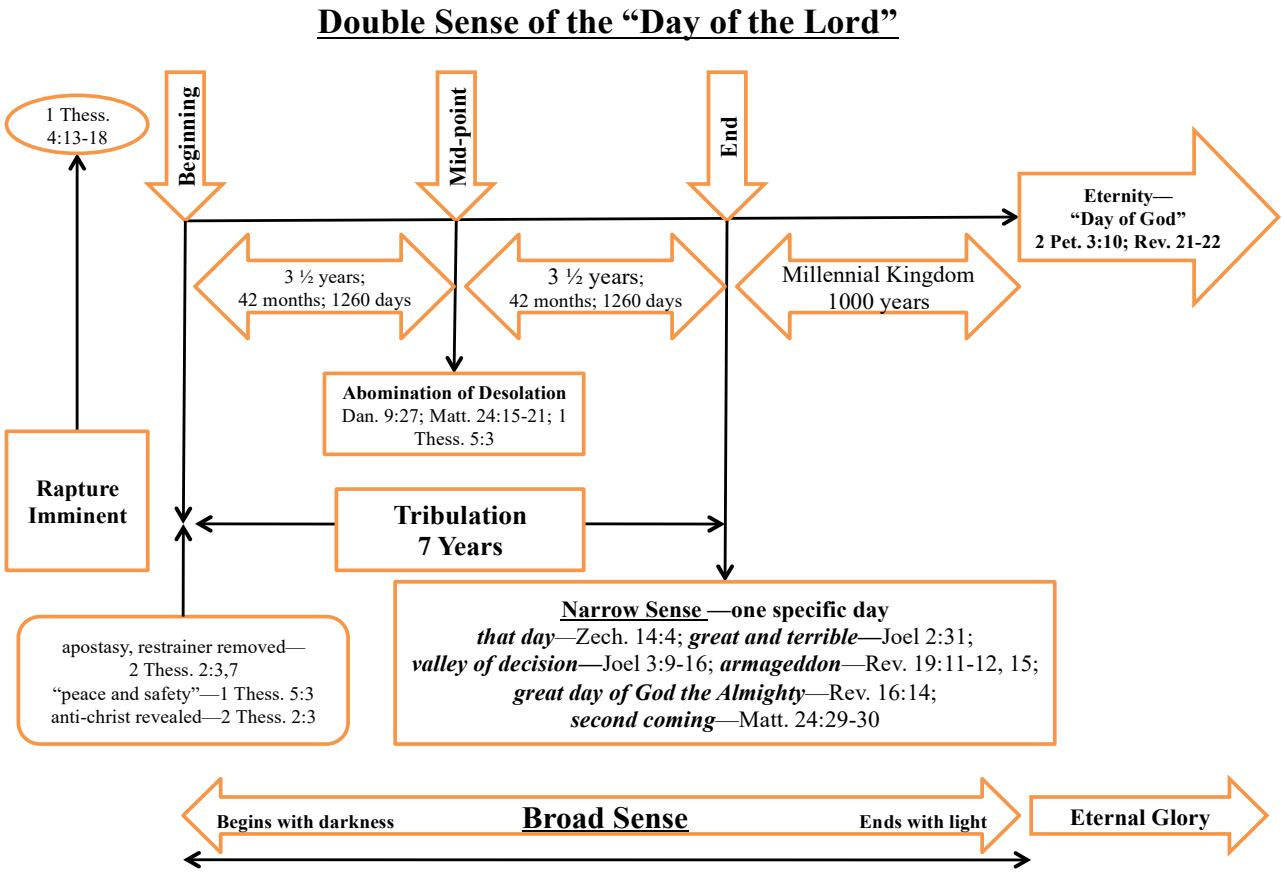
- **There is a 2-fold nature of *"the day of the Lord"***
  - There is **darkness and a tremendous outpouring of divine wrath** upon the world, as recorded in Joel 2:1-2, Amos 5:18-20, Zephaniah 1:14-15, Zechariah 14:1-5, 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11, 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12, Revelation chapters 6-19.

- But there is also **light and an outpouring of divine blessing**, and the administration of God's rule, as seen described in Joel 3:9-21, Zechariah 14:6-9, Isaiah 11:3-9, Ezekiel 28:25-26 and Revelation 20.

The double sense of *"the day of the Lord"*

- First, there is a **broad sense** of ***the day of the Lord***. The **"broad sense"** is **an extended period of time** involving divine intervention related to the 70th week of Daniel and the Millennial reign of Christ.

- Second, there is a **narrow sense** of ***the day of the Lord***. The **"narrow sense"** is **one specific day on which Christ will return to earth**. It is also referred to as ***the great and terrible day of the Lord*** in Joel 2:31, ***the valley of decision*** in Joel 3:9-16, ***the second coming*** in Matthew 24:29-30, and ***Armageddon*** in Revelation 19:11-12, 15.



Did the church, as a whole, understand the meaning of the phrase, *"I will come like a thief"* and its relationship to *the day of the Lord*? YES!

- In the Olivet Discourse the apostles Peter, James, John and Andrew were present. They were told by the Lord the context of the phrase ***I will come like a thief***. We see this in Matthew 24:42-44 . . .

Matthew 24:42-44— 42 "Therefore be on the alert, for you do not know which day your Lord is coming. 43 But be sure of this, that if the head of the house had known at what time of the night

the thief was coming, he would have been on the alert and would not have allowed his house to be broken into. 44 For this reason you also must be ready; for the Son of Man is coming at an hour when you do not think He will."

- In Revelation 3:3 the church in Sardis would have understood the phrase as a warning both broadly and narrowly.

  Revelation 3:3— 'Remember therefore what you have received and heard; and keep it, and repent. If therefore you will not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come upon you.

  - At the time John record Revelation 40 years had elapsed from Paul's writing of 1 Thessalonians. Writings between 1 Thessalonians in 50 A.D. and Revelation in 90 A.D. make it quite evident that the early church understood the imminent return of Christ at the Rapture and in judgment.

Was the church taught the characteristics of *the day of the Lord*? YES!

- In 1 Thessalonians 5:3 we read . . .

  1 Thessalonians 5:3— While they are saying, "Peace and safety!" then destruction will come upon them suddenly like labor pains upon a woman with child, and they will not escape.

  - From this verse we learn that ***the day of the Lord*** is ***like a thief . . .*** **imminent, signless, without warning, suddenly and unexpectedly**.

  - The unbelieving world will be saying ***"Peace and safety!"*** The tense and mood of the phrase, ***while they are saying***, indicates coincidence of time. In other words, it is at the very moment they are saying ***"Peace and safety!"*** that ***the day of the Lord*** begins.

    - **This is the only place in the New Testament where this phrase is used.**

  - The word ***safety*** (Greek: *asphaleia*) means "certainly, safety, certain, secure, not liable to fall, steadfast and firm." This word is rare in the New Testament and is a legal term meaning "bond" and "security." In light of the fact that a covenant is a "bond" or "formal agreement of legal validity," it could be that it will be Antichrist forcing a covenant upon Israel at the very beginning of Daniel's 70th week (Daniel 9:27) which will cause the unbelievers to conclude that the world, at last, has ***"peace and safety."*** it is at that very moment that ***the day of the Lord*** will come upon the world suddenly. This event is, in fact, a time of false peace and safety.

What does Scripture teach regarding false peace and safety?

- Israel is re-gathered in The Land (Ezekiel 38:8, 11-12, 14—future battle of Gog and Magog).
- A great world leader emerges onto the scene (Daniel 7:24).
- A rebuilt temple in Jerusalem for sacrifice and worship (Daniel 9:27, Matthew24-25, Revelation 11).
- A covenant of peace with Israel (Daniel 9:27).

- With all these condition in place, the unbelieving world concludes that ***"peace and safety"*** has finally been achieved with the nation of Israel. The Jews will believe it as well. But we read in Jeremiah 23:16-20 . . .

  Jeremiah 23:16-20— 16 Thus says the LORD of hosts, "Do not listen to the words of the prophets who are prophesying to you. They are leading you into futility; they speak a vision of their own imagination, not from the mouth of the LORD. 17 They keep saying to those who despise Me, 'The LORD has said, "You will have peace"'; and as for everyone who walks in the stubbornness of his own heart, they say, 'Calamity will not come upon you.' 18 But who has stood in the council of the LORD, that he should see and hear His word? Who has given heed to His word and listened? 19 Behold, the storm of the LORD has gone forth in wrath, even a whirling tempest; it will swirl down on the head of the wicked. 20 The anger of the LORD will not turn back until He has performed and carried out the purposes of His heart; in the last days you will clearly understand it.

- It is at this moment that ***the day of the Lord will come upon them suddenly like the birth pangs upon a woman with child, and they shall not escape*** (1 Thessalonians 5:3).

  1 Thessalonians 5:3— While they are saying, "Peace and safety!" then destruction will come upon them suddenly.

  - This inaugurates the judgment phase of ***the day of the Lord***.

  - The term ***destruction*** (Greek: *olethros*), used by Paul in 1 Thessalonians 5:3, is a word unique to Paul in the New Testament.
  - The word ***destruction*** does not imply annihilation, but carries the thought of **utter and hopeless ruin**, the loss of all that gives worth to existence. Ultimately, ***destruction*** results in eternal separation from Christ.

What does Scripture teach regarding true peace and safety?

- God regathers Israel back into The Land (Isaiah 27:13; 65:9; Jeremiah 32:37; Ezekiel 28:25-26; 39:25-29).

- Messiah rules (Isaiah 9:6-7; Jeremiah 23:5-6; 33:14-22).

- Worship in the Millennial Temple (Jeremiah 33:18; Ezekiel 37:24-28; Haggai 2:9).

- A <u>true</u> covenant of peace with Israel (Isaiah 54:10; Ezekiel 34:23-30).

<u>Discussion Questions:</u>

1. Why is the doctrine of imminence of such comfort to Christians?
2. How do you respond to a Christian who sees no importance for the doctrine of imminence?
3. As we have learned in this lesson, what is God's purpose for ***the day of the Lord***?
4. What does Scripture teach us about what it means to have true ***peace and safety***?
5. Why will mankind be so easily fooled when the false ***peace and safety*** come upon them?