

*For if we believe that Yeshua died and rose again* – Continuing with his purpose to assure the believing community in Thessalonica that they should not “lose hope” even though some had given their lives for their faith in Yeshua, Paul points to the very foundation of the believer’s hope, namely, the death and resurrection of Yeshua. This reminds one of Paul’s words in 1Cor 15:3–4.

For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Messiah died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures.... (1Cor 15:3–4)

The opening words of our text, “*For if we believe*” (εἰ γὰρ πιστεύομεν) should be understood as stating a fundamental truth and not as though Paul is suggesting that the Thessalonian community, as well as himself, were not absolutely certain about the death and resurrection of Yeshua. For in the *koine* Greek, the word “if” (εἰ, *ei*) can carry both the sense of “that which might be” as well that which is a well known fact, thus “since” or “because.”<sup>1</sup> We could therefore translate the opening line of our verse as “For since we believe that Yeshua died and rose again....”

We see, then, that the death and resurrection of Yeshua functions as the absolute foundation for our faith and assurance that in Him we have eternal salvation. As Leon Morris notes:

The Christian confidence is not the result of some philosophical speculation, nor the elaboration of a religious myth. Rather, it rests on a sure historical foundation.<sup>2</sup>

This also highlights another very important aspect of Yeshua’s death and resurrection, namely, that His death upon the cross was an actual payment for the sin of all whom He would redeem. Moreover, His resurrection demonstrated forever that the payment He made was fully accepted by the Father and thus assures that all for whom He died will be eternally saved. This likewise means that God, in His sovereign plan, would bring all those He has chosen unto Himself to exercise the gift of saving faith (Eph 2:8–10) and the spiritual desire and strength to

1 Note the primary definition of εἰ in BDAG: “marker of a condition, existing in fact or hypothetical.” Obviously in our text, it is a mark of certainty.

2 Morris, Leon. *The First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians*, in NICNT, (Eerdmans, 1959), p. 138.

endure in that faith unto the end (Jn 6:27).

For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them. (Eph 2:8–10)

All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out. (Jn 6:37)

For surely, the death and resurrection of Yeshua is well attested by many witnesses, even as Paul writes in his first epistle to the Corinthian community.

For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Messiah died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. After that He appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most of whom remain until now, but some have fallen asleep; (1Cor 15:3–6)

Thus, Paul emphasizes the death and resurrection of Yeshua as the sure foundation of our faith in Him, for by His death He made atonement for all whom He would save eternally, and through His miraculous resurrection and ascension into glory, He forever verified that the price He had paid to redeem all who were given to Him was fully accepted by the Father.

For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. This is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day. (Jn 6:38–39)

*... even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Yeshua.*— Here we see that the death and resurrection of Yeshua, verified by many eye-witnesses and documented in the written record of the inspired Scriptures, is the very foundation upon which one's saving faith is anchored. Time and time again, in the Apostolic Scriptures, the death and resurrection of Yeshua form the undisputed guarantee for the believer's resurrection at the coming of Yeshua. As Paul makes clear in his first epistle to the Corinthians:

Now if Messiah is preached, that He has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there is no resurrection of the dead, not even Messiah has been raised; and if Messiah has not been raised, then our preaching is vain, your faith also is vain. (1Cor 15:12–14)

Indeed, not only the death of Yeshua on the cross, which was payment for the sins of all whom God would redeem, but His resurrection on the third day (1Cor 15:4) sealed the vicarious nature of the atonement He procured. For if the “wages of sin is death” (Rom 6:23), then His death paid for the sins of all He would redeem and His resurrection not only secured the atonement for all who were given to Him, but also demonstrated that eternal life, not death, would be theirs.

This truth of the vicarious atonement which Yeshua procured for all whom He would save is made clear in Paul’s wording found in the Greek of our verse. The phrase in the NASB, “*even so God will bring with Him*” is, in the Greek, οὕτως καὶ ὁ θεὸς τοὺς κοιμηθέντας διὰ τοῦ Ἰησοῦ ἔξει σὺν αὐτῷ, “and even so God will bring through Him [Yeshua].” Undoubtedly the following context has made the preposition “through Him” to be understood as “by means of His redemptive work” and thus “will bring with Him” becomes the resultant translation. Yet, as we will see in the final phrase of our verse, an additional aspect of this wording may be given.

Interestingly the ESV adds “with Him” while retaining “through Him” as the translation of the Greek διὰ (*dia*), even though there are no Greek manuscripts that clearly have both in our verse.

For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. (1Thess 4:14, ESV)

The obvious issue that arises with the translation “will bring with Him,” is that the following context indicates that those believers who have died will be raised from the dead upon Yeshua’s coming. Given this reality, a question arises as to how they are “with Him” when He comes, while the resurrection of those who have died does not take place until He comes. If we retain the primary sense of the preposition διὰ (*dia*) which is “through” or “by means of,” then the sense could well be that through the means of God’s divine power and purpose, He will resurrect those believers who have “fallen asleep in Yeshua” and reunite their resurrected body and soul so that they join with the

believers who remain alive until His coming.

...those who have fallen asleep in [through] Yeshua.— Paul has already used the metaphor of “sleep” in the previous verse to denote the soul that remains even after death comes upon the body. Such usage undoubtedly reinforces that fact that death is not the end of human existence, for the resurrection is as sure as is the historical resurrection of Yeshua. Thus, life after death is a clear and obvious reality as taught by the inspired scriptures.

So what is Paul’s meaning when he writes that believers in Yeshua, when they die in this life, have “fallen asleep *through* Yeshua?” It seems very likely that the preposition *dia*, in this context (as well as in others) when followed by the genitive (as it does in our text), indicates “attendant circumstances,” i.e., important realities that accompany the given activity.<sup>1</sup> Thus, Paul’s usage in our text was a simple way to emphasize that believers who die before the coming of Yeshua die as those who are eternally in union with Him and will therefore come to life at His coming and join those who are alive at His return. This fits perfectly with Paul’s teaching in the next verses.

**15–17 For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Messiah will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord.**

Beginning with the word “For” (*γάρ*, *gar*),<sup>2</sup> Paul now gives further explanation of what he has taught in the previous verses, namely, that when Yeshua returns He would not be concerned only for those believers who had survived at the time of His coming but would equally be coming for those who had already died. Paul’s addressing this particular topic would seem to make it clear that within the believing community in Thessalonica there were various perspectives being held

1 C. F. D. Moule, *An Idiom-Book of New Testament Greek* (Cambridge University Press, 1971), 57. (cf. Acts 15:32; 2Cor. 24; Eph. 6:18; Heb. 13:22)

2 In koine Greek, the word “for” (*γάρ*) can never begin a sentence but must always be “post positive” in word order. Yet in English the word “For” very often begins a sentence when it states qualifications of what has been previously stated.

regarding what would take place when Yeshua returned. It seems clear that some wondered whether, in one way or another, at the coming of Yeshua, the believers who had passed away would be at a disadvantage in comparison with those still living on earth. Did they believe that for those that had been previously translated to heaven there would be no participation in celebration of Yeshua's promised return to earth? Or were they thinking that they would only be observers but not participants, thus not fully participating? Paul's wording in our verse does not give us an answer to the question, nor is it clear that the question itself was a large concern as pertains to those believers who had passed away.

What Paul does make clear in our verse is emphasized at the beginning of the text, namely, that what he is teaching was received directly from Yeshua Himself, for Paul expounds his teaching as based upon the very "word of the Lord." What is more, he uses the plural pronoun "we say" rather than the singular "I say." This strongly indicates that the teaching of Yeshua's return was something He taught to all of the apostles, and was no doubt related to Paul as well.

*...that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord* – In this phrase it appears that Paul considered that he would be alive when Yeshua returned, and that His promise to return was considered by Paul and probably others to be within their life time. That many considered this to be what would happen gave rise to those who mocked the believers on the basis that what they were taught was not true.

Yet here, in our text, Paul, being carried along by the Ruach HaKodesh, strongly states that Yeshua is coming again, and that those who have died before His coming reside with Him in spirit and will be reunited with their resurrected bodies at His return. The scriptures do not give us all of the surrounding details of His coming, for belief in His return and our anticipation of it is, once again, given to us by God as that which requires the utilization of our faith. Surely the fact that Yeshua is presented in the Scriptures as the Creator verifies the reality that at His coming, He will bring all things to pass according to His infinite power and the divinely ordained purpose of God: Father, Son, and Spirit.

It is, of course, the common desire of our finite humanity to discover the time of His coming. But in this regard we should again ponder the words of Yeshua Himself as He taught His disciples on this subject.

But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone... Therefore be on the alert, for you do not know which day your Lord is

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coming.... 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. (Matt 24:36, 42, 44)

The point is obvious: we are constantly to be ready for His coming. This requires diligence, purpose, and attending to those aspects of life which strengthen our faith and understanding of who we are in Yeshua. As Peter writes:

Therefore, prepare your minds for action, keep sober in spirit, fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Yeshua the Messiah. (1Pet 1:13)

Paul emphasizes this aspect of our faith in his epistle to Titus.

For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Messiah Yeshua, who gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds. (Titus 2:11–14)

**16 – For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Messiah will rise first.**