

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.**

In this verse the sentence begins with the Greek *ὅτι* (*hoti*), which generally takes on the sense of our English word “because,” being parallel to the opening word of v. 15, *γάρ* (*gar*) which generally means “for.” Thus Paul continues to give the basis for the assertion he has made in v. 15, namely, that those believers in Yeshua who have died before the return of Yeshua will not be, in any way, disregarded but will fully participate in the return of Yeshua. Indeed, it will be the very coming of Yeshua Who established victory over death for all who are His, that will establish for them the unprecedented victory of eternal life. Thus His return will demonstrate to the entire universe the full and eternal victory which He has won for all those whom He has redeemed by paying the infinite price for their eternal salvation.

The language Paul uses in our verse is surely the most explicit description of the events heralding Messiah’s return found anywhere in Paul’s writings and perhaps even in the whole Apostolic Scriptures as

well. This being the case, it is not surprising that these words of Paul have become a focal point for those who want a “blue print” to predict various events that will characterize the future and end times. Yet it surely is not the intent of Paul to give a detailed description of all that will take place in the end times. As one author notes regarding our text:

A real event is being described, but it is one which cannot be described literally since the direct activity of God cannot be fully comprehended in human language. The biblical writers have therefore to resort to analogy and metaphor, the language of symbol, in order to convey their message.<sup>1</sup>

It is clear that in vv. 16–17 Paul is giving further emphasis upon the message he gives in v. 15. This could be graphically demonstrated to show the parallels.

v. 15	v. 16–17
we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord	we who are alive and remain
v. 16	
those who have fallen asleep.	the dead in Messiah

The opening words of v. 16, “For the Lord Himself” (αὐτὸς ὁ κύριος) emphasize that Yeshua does not send angels to gather the elect into their eternal dwelling but comes Himself as a mighty and victorious warrior to gather His own for whom He has won their eternal freedom and security, and to bring them to dwell with Him forever. Indeed, Paul uses language which portrays the coming of a victorious warrior who has won the victory and thus the safety of all those for whom he fought and overcame the enemy.

...*descend from heaven with a shout* – Here Paul offers us the picture of a victorious warrior returning home having conquered the enemy and having secured peace and tranquility for his people. The Greek word translated “shout” is κέλευσμα (*keleusma*), found only here in the Apostolic scriptures, and denotes the conqueror’s victory cry. What Paul is teaching us here is that Yeshua will certainly return as the Victor over sin and death, gathering all of His own to Himself. This means that by God’s omnipotent power, those who have died prior to His coming will be brought to life, their spirits reunited with their resurrected body,

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1 Marshall, I. H., *The Thessalonian Correspondence* (1990), quoted from Weima, Jeffry A. D., *1–2 Thessalonians* (Baker, 2014), p. 324.

and thus made whole and perfect for all eternity. Thus, the “shout” is a cry of total and eternal victory for all Yeshua has redeemed.

... *with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God* – It may well be that the “voice of the archangel” is the “shout” mentioned previously, for in the military world of the first century, victorious troops along with the captain would most likely be announced by a soldier trained for such duty. The only other time the word “archangel” (ἀρχαγγέλος, *arxangelos*) is found in the Apostolic Scriptures is in Jude 9 and is identified as “Micheal, the archangel.” As a result, some commentators suggest that it is also the archangel Micheal who announces the arrival of Yeshua in His return to the earth in the eschaton.

Here, once again, it appears that Paul is using a metaphor which would have been well recognized by those to whom he is writing, namely, that the return of victorious troops would ultimately be headed by the commander and would be announced by trumpet sounds signalling the victory they had accomplished.

In our text, the “trumpet” (σάλπιγξ, *salpigtx*) was used as a signal for special events as well as gathering troops, etc., for battle. We see that the sound of the trumpet (שׁוֹפָר, *shofar*) likewise accompanied the giving of the Torah.

So it came about on the third day, when it was morning, that there were thunder and lightning flashes and a thick cloud upon the mountain and a very loud trumpet sound, so that all the people who were in the camp trembled. And Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God, and they stood at the foot of the mountain. (Ex 19:16–17)

We likewise find Paul referring to the sound of the trumpet at Messiah’s coming, in his first epistle to the Corinthians.

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

In all of these instances in which the “trumpet” is sounded, the language models a metaphor picturing the return of a valiant and victorious commander to celebrate the victory He has won. He does so by bringing to Himself all those for whom He fought and for whom the victory has been secured.

Thus, whether our text teaches us that such “trumpet sounds” and “the voice of an archangel” will be a physical phenomenon at Yeshua’s coming, or that such descriptions are being used by Paul in a metaphoric or symbolic manner, is uncertain. What is certain is that Yeshua is coming again, and that by whatever means is deemed necessary, His coming will be fully broadcast throughout the universe and He will come as the infinite victor over sin and death, gathering to Himself all those He has redeemed.

*...and the dead in Messiah will rise first.* The initial word “and” is consecutive, thus introducing the result of Messiah coming as the One Who has already been victorious over sin and death. It is His eternal and infinite victory that procures the eternal salvation of all who are His. As Paul writes in Romans:

Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Messiah Yeshua. For the law of the Spirit of life in Messiah Yeshua has set you free from the law of sin and of death. (Rom 8:1–2)

Here Paul brings us back to the primary issue he is addressing in this immediate context, i.e., whether or not those believers who have died before Yeshua’s coming will participate in the glory and victory celebration of His actual, physical return to the earth. He makes it absolutely clear that when Yeshua returns, those believers who have died throughout earth’s history will be resurrected, their eternal souls reunited with their physical bodies, and made whole for all eternity.

Simply pondering such a magnificent truth reminds one of what Paul wrote to the Corinthians in his first epistle to that community, quoting from Hosea 13:14:

“O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR VICTORY? O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR STING?” The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the Torah but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Yeshua Messiah. (1Cor 15:55–57)

Very often there are those who profess faith in Yeshua who believe we should be able to “discern the signs” that point to Yeshua’s soon return. It was so in Yeshua’s day as well, as we read in Matthew’s gospel.

As He was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to Him privately, saying, “Tell us, when will these things happen, and what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?” (Matt24:3)

But then, after receiving this question and reminding His disciples in veiled terms that the Abrahamic covenant must be fulfilled, i.e., “in your seed all the nations of the earth will be blessed” (Gen 22:18), Yeshua tells them (and us),

But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone. For the coming of the Son of Man will be just like the days of Noah. (Matt 24:36–37)

Therefore be on the alert, for you do not know which day your Lord is coming. 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. 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 24:42–44)

Paul will use this same metaphor in 5:2.

For you yourselves know full well that the day of the Lord will come just like a thief in the night. (1Thess 5:2)

The point of Yeshua’s teaching is obvious. If the Almighty were to give us clear and exact “signs” indicating when Yeshua would be returning, it is likely that many would not live anticipating His soon return, but would simply “get things together” just prior to the announced time.

If we are all honest with ourselves, we would admit that at times we ask ourselves the question: “Is it really true?” “Could Yeshua come in my lifetime?” “Is it possible that I will actually see Him and have eternity with Him?” Obviously anyone who is a true believer may pause for a moment contemplating such questions, but will very soon turn to rejoicing, believing that He will return and that He may possibly come in one’s life-time. What is more, that the Almighty has not given us a means by which we can “pinpoint” exactly when He will return only emphasizes the need to be strong in faith, living with the reality that He could come at any time.

This brings forward another important question: “When He comes, will He find us faithfully serving Him?” Indeed, this ought to be a regular motivation to grow in our love for Him and thus our willingness to serve Him with our whole lives, growing in our ability to honor Him in all aspects of our lives, to hear “well done, good and faithful servant.” (Matt 25:23)

**17 – 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.**

Here we see the culmination of Paul's desire to console the believing community of Thessalonica. He uses the first person "we," thus including himself as equally a member of God's family together with the believers in Thessalonica. Having given the divine truth regarding believers who have died, who will be resurrected at Yeshua's coming, he now centers on all those who would be alive at His coming.

The fact that Paul uses the first person "we" does not necessarily mean that he expected to be among those who would still be living when Messiah returns. Rather, in using the plural "we," he unites himself with Timothy, Silas, his coworkers, as well as with the believers in Thessalonica as equally secure in the Lord through the gift of saving faith.

*...will be caught up together with them in the clouds* – The word translated in the English by "caught up" is the Greek ἀρπάζω (*arpazō*) which as a verb can be used to denote "seizing, steal, carry off, drag away" but also means "to snatch" or "take away." This term was surely used by Paul to indicate that the believers being taken into the very presence of the Lord would be that which was done entirely by the power of the Almighty and not something that the believers themselves could orchestrate. Moreover, the use of this verb would emphasize that one cannot prepare for such a wonderful event but must be always ready to meet the Lord when He comes and rescues us from the fallen world to live forever in His presence.

Moreover, Paul's words here make it clear that all who genuinely make up the "ekklesia," the gathered body of Messiah, whether having died before Yeshua's coming or remain alive at His coming, will constitute the redeemed people of God, and will therefore share eternity together. This is yet another truth by which Paul intended to encourage the Thessalonian community as well as all believers. For those who are alive when Yeshua returns and those who are raised from their graves will eternally be one family.

*...and so we shall always be with the Lord.* Granted, we hardly have the ability to fully ponder such a glorious reality, but by faith we know that eternity with our Savior, giving praise to the Father and being fully enabled by the Ruach, will be that for which we were created. We will have everlasting joy without pain, sorrow, or death, but with the full ability forever to honor the One Who has redeemed us.