

18 – Therefore comfort one another with these words.

The opening word of this concluding statement of Paul for this section of the letter, is “ὥστε (*hōste*), a word that is essentially synonymous with the Greek word *τοίγαροῦν* (*toigaroun*) used in v. 8 of our chapter and also διὸ found in 5:11, all of which are used to highlight practical consequences from what has just been said. In our immediate context it is clear that Paul is admonishing the believers within the community of Thessalonica to care for each other, which includes encouraging one another as well as caring for each other and even lovingly admonishing each other to grow and strengthen their faith in Yeshua and all that He has promised. Obviously in the present context, the comforting aspect is to fully take hold of the fact that Yeshua had promised His return, an event that would bring the believer’s faith to its ultimate goal of being “always [i.e., forever] with the Lord” and would therefore end all forms of troubles and striving, as well as persecution for one’s faith.

Obviously in times of peace and tranquility believers may not dwell as strongly on the promised return of Yeshua which will bring to a close earth’s history and thus the sorrow that is an inevitable reality in a fallen world. What is more, it is surely the case that when believers become the target of persecution for their faith, the return of Yeshua becomes all the more an anticipated and longed-for promise. This was, not doubt, a reality among the believing community in Thessalonica as Paul was penning this epistle, for we know that in the Roman empire followers of Yeshua were often the subject of persecution, and this pertains specifically to the believers in Thessalonica as Paul noted earlier in 2:14–15a.

For you, brethren, became imitators of the churches of God in Messiah Yeshua that are in Judea, for you also endured the same sufferings at the hands of your own countrymen, even as they did from the Jews.... (1Thess 2:14–15a)

This, of course, does not mean (as some may teach) that believers in Yeshua should expect to be persecuted for their faith, and that even the more one is persecuted for one’s faith, the more one is honored and loved by God. Surely Yeshua Himself taught that people of faith may be persecuted for their faith, but this does not mean that a believer should desire to be hated, maligned, or persecuted as a way of “standing out” as a true believer in Yeshua. Rather, when such persecution is faint or even non-existent, genuine thanksgiving should be the norm, for this allows an even greater open door for evangelism and publicly being

witnesses to others of God's abundant love in Yeshua.

Paul admonishes the believing community he is addressing to "comfort one another" (*παρακαλεῖτε ἀλλήλους, parakaleite allēlous*). What is obvious in this admonition of Paul is that it is the norm within the Apostolic teaching that believers were to form a "community" in which they met together regularly, became familiar with each other's needs, and committed themselves to help each other to grow and be strengthened in their commitment to be followers of Messiah. In his epistle to the Galatians, Paul emphasizes the manner in which the believing community should be caring for and helping each other.

Bear one another's burdens, and thereby fulfill the Torah of Messiah. (Gal 6:2)

The "burdens" to which Paul refers may have been various things, but it seems likely that his admonition included helping those who were unable to pay the "*fiscus judaicus*" (Jewish tax) which the Roman government had enacted. Surely the community of believers in Yeshua, while comprising both Jews and Gentiles, would have been considered by the Roman government a "Jewish sect" and would have therefore been the target of additional taxation. This would have been especially difficult for widows and slaves, and would therefore have required the help of the community as a whole to pay the necessary tax. Thus, to "comfort one another," while primarily pointing to the believer's hope of the return of Yeshua by Whom such persecution would cease, the phrase surely includes helping one another in order to remain strong and faithful as witnesses of God's redemptive power through Yeshua and the sanctifying work of the Ruach.

Thus, in this final verse of our chapter, we are once again admonished to understand the high and vitally important aspect of regularly gathering together within the believing community in order to fulfill the very command of the Scriptures, to help one another so that all will be enabled to grow strong in the faith and together be a growing witness of God's power, grace, and love as those who are His, living out a life of faith in this fallen world. As the author of Hebrews states:

...and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near. (Heb 10:24–25)

Chapter 5

commentary

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

Having given, in the previous context of chapter 4, a clear teaching regarding those believers who had died before the promised return of Yeshua, that they would be resurrected upon His coming, Paul now addresses the obvious questions that apparently many were voicing, namely: “how would one be able to know the time of Yeshua’s return?” Of course, this question has been one which many, even in our current day, are asking, and various “teachings” have, throughout modern times, been set forth to answer this question.

- Edgar C. Whisenant, a former NASA engineer, boldly and confidently declared that Yeshua would return in 1988. His book, *88 Reasons Why the Rapture will be in 1988*, sold 4.5 million copies. When Yeshua did not return in 1988, Edgar went on to re-adjust his calculations to 1989, 1993, and 1994 – each with its own book.

- Marshal Applewhite convinced 38 followers the end of time would take place with the Comet Hale-Bopp and behind the comet would be a UFO that would rapture them up. Applewhite and all 38 followers participated in a mass suicide with the belief that death would help them board God’s UFO.

- Harold Camping was an influential American Christian radio broadcaster and evangelist who predicted that the rapture would occur on May 21, 2011.

Obviously these and others who seek to “pinpoint” the time of Yeshua’s return have not studied the Scriptures themselves. For Paul’s opening verse in this chapter of 1Thessalonians makes it very clear that the return of Yeshua cannot be calculated and has not been given by any inspired text of the Scriptures.

Now as to the times and the epochs, brethren, you have no need of anything to be written to you. – “times and epochs” is in the Greek χρόνους ἢ καιροὺς (*xronous ei kairous*). The point Paul is making here, is obviously not that the believing community in Thessalonica already had all the information they needed to calculate the return of Yeshua! Rather, it seems ob-

vious that they had already been taught that divine revelation had not been given to the Apostles in order to calculate the time of Yeshua's return. But the real question that seems to be in the minds of some of the early believers is whether or not they would participate in Yeshua's return if He came after they had died. Paul has already addressed that question in the previous context, stating that those believers who had died before Yeshua's return, would be resurrected first, and would be joined by those believers who are alive at His coming (4:16–17).

Some have interpreted our current text as dealing with the issue of the "great tribulation" period, and whether or not those who had come to faith in Yeshua and were living when the tribulation began, would experience the woes of that era. But this does not appear to be Paul's focus either. Rather, he is admonishing the believers in Thessalonica to be strengthened in their faith, that even though there is no divinely given "calendar" that pinpoints the exact time when Yeshua will return, there is clear revelation that all who are "in Messiah" will be gathered by God's almighty power and would thereby spend eternity in the very presence of the Lord and the eternal glory of His majesty.

...*times and epochs* [χρόνους ἢ καιρὸς] – This same phrase is found also in Acts 1:7 being accompanied by an important notice given by Yeshua Himself just prior to His ascension.

He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority; but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth."
(Acts 1:7–8)

It may be that in the ancient Greek culture, "times and epochs" was a conventional doublet, much like our English "times and seasons." While some commentators seek to offer an interpretation that marks a difference between the two words, it appears most likely that the two words were commonly used together as a hendiadys, i.e., a single idea expressed by two words joined with the conjunction "and." This being the case, Paul's use of the phrase "times and epochs" simply means "the future" in its broadest sense. Clearly, if the Lord intended that we should be able to pinpoint the exact time of His return, He would have doubtlessly given all the necessary information. That He did not indicate explicitly that we are to be ready for His coming at all times, and to live with this reality, always awaiting His coming, the timing of which has been ordained and known only by God Himself.

...*you have no need of anything to be written to you* – It would seem clear that the reason the Thessalonian believers did not need further explanation to the question some were raising, i.e., “when will Yeshua return?” is because they had already been taught the reality that only Yeshua Himself knows that precise timing of His return. For Yeshua had made this clear just prior to His ascension to the Father.

The point that is important for us to realize, then, is that even though Yeshua made it clear prior to His ascension that no one would know precisely when He would return, there are always those who feel the need to know more precisely when He would return and who think there are ways of obtaining this information. It is always the tendency of our fallen nature to think that empirical evidence or human logic is more reliable than faith in the truth of God’s word. In our human nature we often seek a logical methodology for determining how or in what manner God will accomplish His promises rather than being satisfied with the truth that He will do all of His holy will, and that we must trust Him fully to accomplish what He has promised.

This, of course, does not mean we should fail to understand and acquire knowledge of what God has revealed to us in the Scriptures. But at the same time we must recognize that God’s eternal plans and purposes require His children to exercise the gift of faith in order to establish in our own hearts the certainty of all His promises.

For you yourselves know full well that the day of the Lord will come just like a thief in the night. – The return of our Savior, Yeshua, is well spoken of in the Scriptures and thus ought to be one of the primary motivations in every believer’s life to live in obedience to Him and the leading of the Ruach. In this way we are enabled to demonstrate our genuine love for Him and the redemption He has procured for all who are His. Indeed, true love for the One Who has loved us ought to be the primary motivation for serving Him, being those redeemed for His glory.

We may note a number of important aspects of our lives of faith which center upon Yeshua’s promised return.

- (1) First is that we must be always anticipating His return, living a life of faith so that when He comes He will find us faithfully serving Him.
- (2) Secondly, we know from the Scriptures that He is coming Himself, not sending an angel, as we read in 4:16, and the emphatic use of the added “Himself.”

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 Christ will rise first. (1Thess 4:16)

(3) Yeshua will return visibly and for all who await His coming.

For just as the lightning comes from the east and flashes even to the west, so will the coming of the Son of Man be. (Matt 24:27)
Behold He is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see Him, (Rev 1:7)

... to give relief to you who are afflicted and to us as well when the Lord Yeshua will be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire...(2Thess 1:7)

For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, (1Thess 4:16)

And then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky with power and great glory. (Matt 24:30)

(4) Yeshua will gather his people, whether living or dead.

His angels will gather his elect from the four winds.

He will raise up “those who belong to him”

And He will send forth His angels with A GREAT TRUMPET and THEY WILL GATHER TOGETHER His elect from the four winds, from one end of the sky to the other. (Matt 24:31)
But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, after that those who are Christ’s at His coming, (1Cor 15:23)

(5) When Yeshua comes, He will judge the world.

For the Son of Man is going to come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and will then repay every man according to his deeds. (Matt 16:27)

But when the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, then He will sit on His glorious throne. All the nations will be gathered before Him; and He will separate them from one another, as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats; (Matt 25:31–32)

(6) All who are His will dwell with Him for all eternity (1Thess 4:16–17)

Today you will be with me in paradise” (Luke 23:43)

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 Christ 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.

... *the day of the Lord will come just like a thief in the night.* – Paul has already emphasized that the community of believers in Thessalonica were well educated regarding the coming of Yeshua, and that His coming in the clouds could be understood as “unannounced in advance,” for He will come “like a thief in the night.” The obvious meaning of this phrase is simply that someone who is coming to steal does so in the most hidden of ways and by means of an entry that cannot be detected.

Therefore, in using this metaphor Paul is clearly teaching us that we cannot calculate the exact time of Yeshua’s return. Surely we may see signs of world events that we think may suggest His soon return, but we still cannot predict the time of His coming. What is more, the purpose of not announcing nor revealing the exact time of His coming is obvious: we are to be living every day of our lives with the anticipation that He could come at any time.

This will cause us to regularly ask very important questions. (1) Am I living in a way that will honor Him if He comes today? (2) Am I anticipating His return and does such anticipation urge me all the more to be active in serving Him? When He comes, will He find us faithfully serving Him? (3) Is the reality of Yeshua’s coming something that I meditate upon, look forward to, and that gives me strength to more and more live for Him in all aspects of my life?