

see the SON OF MAN COMING ON THE CLOUDS OF THE SKY with power and great glory. 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 24:30-31)

...with His mighty angels in flaming fire – When Yeshua returns, He will not only gather those who are His to Himself, ultimately bringing them with Him to the glory of eternity, but He will also execute judgment upon all who have rejected Him.

Yeshua taught this truth with the parable of the field in which the owner of the field sowed good seed but an enemy came and sowed tares in the field as well.

...when the wheat sprouted and bore grain, then the tares became evident also. The slaves of the landowner came and said to him, ‘Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have tares?’ And he said to them, ‘An enemy has done this!’ The slaves said to him, ‘Do you want us, then, to go and gather them up?’ But he said, ‘No; for while you are gathering up the tares, you may uproot the wheat with them. Allow both to grow together until the harvest; and in the time of the harvest I will say to the reapers, “First gather up the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them up; but gather the wheat into my barn.”’ (Matt 13:26–30)

This teaching emphasizes the reality of what Yeshua taught when He stated:

Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits. Grapes are not gathered from thorn bushes nor figs from thistles, are they? (Matt 7:15–16)

The final clause of our text, i.e., “in flaming fire,” presents an interesting question: should this phrase be attached to v. 7 or is it part of the following text in v. 8? If part of v. 7, the phrase depicts the awesome grandeur of Yeshua’s appearance when He comes to gather His own unto Himself, for all eternity.

But this phrase may also be connected to the following verse, depicting the divine judgment upon rebellious humanity, indicating that God will punish them with “blazing fire.” Surely Isaiah 66 uses “fire” as a symbol of divine judgment. In fact, this final phrase appears to link the vs. 7 & 8 together, showing the eternal salvation of all believers in

Yeshua and the eternal demise of all who reject Him.

For behold, the LORD will come in fire, and His chariots like the whirlwind, to render His anger in fury, and His rebuke with flames of fire. For by fire will the LORD enter into judgment, and by His sword, with all flesh; and those slain by the LORD shall be many. (Is 66:15–16)

Furthermore, angels are often associated with fire in the bible and fire is a common element in the “theophanies” of the Tanach. Note the following:

The angel of the LORD appeared to him in a blazing fire from the midst of a bush; and he looked, and behold, the bush was burning with fire, yet the bush was not consumed. (Ex 3:2)

...the LORD descended upon it in fire; and its smoke ascended like the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mountain quaked violently. (Ex 19:18)

Smoke went up out of His nostrils, and fire from His mouth devoured; coals were kindled by it. (Ps 18:8)

Then I noticed from the appearance of His loins and upward something like glowing metal that looked like fire all around within it, and from the appearance of His loins and downward I saw something like fire; and there was a radiance around Him. (Ezek 1:27)

Thus, combined with the text of Is 66:15–16, these texts surely picture the ultimate revelation of Yeshua as the Lord of the universe, Who is served by angelic beings to accomplish His sovereign will and plan for mankind. Those who are His are guarded and kept from the damaging fire, while all who have rejected Him are overcome by the fire for all eternity, for the fire of His holiness is never extinguished.

8 – ... dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Yeshua.

... *dealing out retribution* – The NASB translation, “dealing out retribution” is a translation of the Greek διδόντος ἐκδίκησιν (*didontos ekdikēsin*) which literally is “*dealing out vengeance or punishment.*” The fact that the semantic range of this noun ἐκδίκησις (*ekdikēsis*) includes “punishment” as well as “vengeance,” gives rise to the NASB translation of

“retribution,” for this word includes the sense of “vengeance,” thereby putting emphasis upon the holiness of God. For in His infinite holiness, He must bring all who have spurned and mocked His righteousness and sovereignty by their blatant disobedience, to pay the penalty they owe. This, of course, in our context relates on the one hand to those who were persecuting the believers in Thessalonica and the divine punishment they would receive, and on the other hand, to the believers in Yeshua, giving them strength to persevere in their faith, recognizing that God would sustain them in their faith and award them for being steadfast in serving Him.

Obviously, those to whom God “deals out retribution” are likewise those who have rejected Him: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. For they have rejected the payment made by Yeshua for all who have been given to Him, to pay the penalty for their sin. And since any sin against the infinitely holy God is thus an infinite transgression, the penalty administered must therefore likewise be eternal. As the author of Hebrews notes:

Anyone who has set aside the Torah of Moses dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. How much severer punishment do you think he will deserve who has trampled under foot the Son of God, and has regarded as unclean the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has insulted the Spirit of grace? For we know Him who said, “VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY.”¹ And again, “THE LORD WILL JUDGE HIS PEOPLE.” It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God. (Heb 10:28–31)

...to those who do not know God – Here is a good example of how the concept “to know someone,” as found in the Scriptures, may actually be understood in a covenant sense, i.e., to “know someone” may mean “to enter into covenant with the one who is known.” Thus, the marriage covenant uses this kind of language to denote marital relations, as we see in Gen 4:1, 4:17 and Matt 1:24–25.

Now the man had relations with his wife Eve, [וַיֵּדָע אָדָם אֶת־חַוָּה אִשְׁתּוֹ, literally “and the man knew Chavah his wife] and she conceived and gave birth to Cain, and she said, “I have gotten a man-child with the help of the LORD.” (Gen 4:1)

1 Deut 32:35-36

Cain had relations with his wife [וַיֵּדַע קַיִן אֶת-אִשְׁתּוֹ] literally “And Cain knew his wife”] and she conceived, and gave birth to Enoch; and he built a city, and called the name of the city Enoch, after the name of his son. (Gen 4:17)

And Joseph awoke from his sleep and did as the angel of the Lord commanded him, and took Mary as his wife, but kept her a virgin [καὶ οὐκ ἐγίνωσκειν αὐτήν, literally “and did not know her”] until she gave birth to a Son; and he called His name Yeshua. (Matt 1:24–25)

We find similar use of the verb “to know,” meaning “to establish a covenant with someone,” when the Scriptures speak of God “knowing someone.”

For those whom He foreknew (*προέγνω*, *proegnō* = to know in advance), He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren; and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified. (Rom. 8:29-30)

Likewise, the covenant between the Father, the Son, and the Spirit, which made certain God’s plan to save a host of people no one could number, also uses the concept “to know someone” as a covenant term, referring to the covenant of God’s grace made in eternity for all whom He would redeem.

For He [Yeshua] was foreknown before the foundation of the world, but has appeared in these last times for the sake of you who through Him are believers in God, who raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God. (1Pet 1:20–21)

Here we see the covenant status of all who come to saving faith in Yeshua, for this is the “new covenant,” made sure for all who are His, for of all those He “foreknew” He will lose none, for He never breaks a covenant He has made. In this case, the covenant is one made between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, as Yeshua revealed when He stated:

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 6:39)

He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out upon us richly through Yeshua Messiah our Savior so that being justified by His grace we would be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life. (Titus 3:5–7)

Surely we are unable to fully explain and grasp all of the aspects of God's divine purpose and plan to save a host of sinners which no one is able to number. But what we do know for certain is this: that true eternal salvation cannot be earned, but is a gift from God, characterized in the Scriptures as "being born again," that is, initiated by God Who endows those He has chosen to receive His gift of eternal salvation by exercising the gift of saving faith. Using the metaphor of birth, it is clear that the one being "born again" clearly is not the one bringing about the birth but is brought to life by a power other than himself.

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. (Eph 2:8–9)

Τῇ γὰρ χάριτί (fem.) ἐστε σεσωσμένοι διὰ πίστεως (fem.) καὶ τοῦτο (neuter) οὐκ ἐξ ὑμῶν, θεοῦ τὸ δῶρον· οὐκ ἐξ ἔργων, ἵνα μὴ τις καυχῆσται.

Note that in the Greek, the word "grace" is feminine in gender as is the word "faith," while the demonstrative "that" is neuter. When a demonstrative is used to refer to a group of previous words in various genders, it is put in the "neuter" gender to show that it applies to both. Thus, Paul's point is clear: neither the grace of God nor the faith to receive His gift of salvation are produced by the sinner himself or herself. Rather, faith is a gift of God.

Note as well Paul's words in Romans regarding saving faith as a gift from God and not something that fallen sinners are able to produce on their own.

In the same way then, there has also come to be at the present time a remnant according to God's gracious choice. But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works, otherwise grace is no longer grace. (Rom 11:5–6)

... and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Yeshua. – Here, once again, we see in the inspired Scriptures a most important and fundamental truth regarding a primary characteristic of those who are truly

believers in Yeshua and who therefore have been granted eternal life. This fundamental change in the true believer's life is that they "obey the gospel of our Lord Yeshua." This makes a clear distinction between the true believer and those who present themselves as "Christians" but whose lives are not characterized as "obeying the gospel for Yeshua" but are known by "loving the world and the things in the world." John makes it clear that those whose lives are characterized by "loving the world" are not truly born again.

Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. (1Jn 2:15)

But what does Paul mean by the phrase "who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Yeshua?" The answer is obvious: the "gospel" is the truth regarding Yeshua as the Son of God, by Whose life, death, resurrection, ascension, and intercession procures eternal life for all those given to Him by the Father. Thus, the phrase "who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Yeshua" is simply another way of describing those who fail to confess Yeshua as the true Lord and Savior of sinners and thus have no divinely given spiritual power and strength to live in obedience to God but rather are motivated by the desires of the flesh. In short, the unbeliever has no desire to honor God but lives to fulfill their own desires. And unfortunately, there may be many who project a "religious life" but who have no true faith in Yeshua.

In contrast, the mark of a true born-again person is that their lives are, as an overarching reality, characterized by seeking to please God, and drawn to repentance when failing to do so. Note these words of Paul in his epistle to the Romans:

But because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who WILL RENDER TO EACH PERSON ACCORDING TO HIS DEEDS: to those who by perseverance in doing good seek for glory and honor and immortality, eternal life; but to those who are selfishly ambitious and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, wrath and indignation. (Rom 2:5-7)

This truth emphasizes the fact that all who are truly saved and born again to a life of faith, will evidence this faith through persevering even in difficult times, as well as when failing to obey the One Who has redeemed them, to seek and be granted repentance and the ability to return to a genuine life of obedience to God.

It is the God-given ability to persevere in one's faith that is the final and all encompassing true mark of genuine, saving faith in Yeshua. The reality is that those who profess to have accepted Yeshua as their Savior yet show no change of life in terms of their choices, that is, the over-arching character of their lives, their true desires, and their self-centered goals in life, show no genuine signs of having been truly born again. Surely there are times in a true believer's life where he or she may wander away from obeying the Lord. But the proof positive of them having been truly born again is that they will inevitably be drawn to seek repentance and forgiveness, and will be granted forgiveness as well as a strengthened faith to persevere in their life of faith as a testimony to others of God's love, grace, and sustaining power.

We see, then, that for the sinner who is granted genuine saving faith in Yeshua, there will be an evident and on-going growth in obedience to the Scriptures, i.e., the word of God. This means that obedience to God and His ways as taught in the Scriptures, will become more and more the desire of the believer, thus producing an obvious pattern of obedience to God's truths for a true believer in Yeshua. Surely there may be times when a true child of God grows weak in their faith and falls into pleasing the flesh rather than living in a way that honors God, but this will inevitably change as the gift of repentance is granted and a true walk with God is re-established, something which will obviously be evident to others.

We should note well that, once again, the very foundation of the Gospel, the "good news revealed by God to mankind," is the saving work of Yeshua. It is by His death, resurrection, ascension, and intercession that He procures eternal life for all those He has purchased and preserved. Moreover, He does so by endowing them with the indwelling Ruach by Whose power they are more and more conformed to the very image of their Redeemer Himself. Thus, those whom the Father has given to Yeshua will live with Him forever in eternity, as the very trophies of God's eternal love, power, and grace.

Indeed, the very fact that the Scriptures clearly teach that Yeshua is our heavenly intercessor, shows us that all those for whom He intercedes will inevitably be eternally saved, for our Savior's intercession is always successful in procuring His desires.

The former priests, on the one hand, existed in greater numbers because they were prevented by death from continuing, but Yeshua, on the other hand, because He continues forever, holds His priesthood permanently. Therefore He is able also to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them. (Heb 7:23-25)

These and other scriptures make it clear that all those who are truly drawn to Yeshua and granted saving faith in Him, will have a clear “life change” and will therefore persevere even in the most difficult circumstances, for those who have been bought with the price of Yeshua’s death, resurrection, ascension, and intercession, will never be lost.

God does not forsake the work which His own hands have begun, as the Prophet bears witness, (Psalm 138:8; Isaiah 64:8) we are the work of his hands; therefore He will complete what He has begun in us. When I say that we are the work of His hands, I do not refer to mere creation, but to the calling by which we are adopted into the number of His sons. For it is a token to us of our election, that the Lord has called us effectually to Himself by His Spirit.¹

1 Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistles of Paul the Apostle to The Philippians, Colossians, and Thessalonians* (The Calvin Translation Society, Edinburgh: 1851) p. 26.