

Moreover, Yeshua Himself makes this clear in His words recorded in Matt 24:36–39.

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. For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and they did not understand until the flood came and took them all away; so will the coming of the Son of Man be. (Matt 24:36–39)¹

Note as well Yeshua's concluding admonition in His teaching regarding His second coming:

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

We see, then, that one of the lies of the enemy which he attempts to sow in the minds of people, is that the idea of a Savior (Who is Yeshua) returning to gather all those He has redeemed, is wrong and even impossible. But the inspired word of God, guarded and maintained by God Himself, cannot be set aside or disregarded. The word of God has been guarded and kept by God, and therefore forever remains the very foundation of truth for all those He has redeemed and is the very truth of God upon which our faith is founded.

And in that regard, we may again consider Paul's admonition in his letter to Titus, that all who are truly born again ought to be anticipating and looking for the return of Yeshua as the One and only true redeemer of all who have been given to Him.

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)

1 For further thoughts on these quotes from the Gospel of Matthew, see my *Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew*, vol. 5, pp. 1129–1136.

3–4 Let no one in any way deceive you, for *it will not come* unless the apostasy comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, who opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as being God.

Let no one in any way deceive you – Paul now continues to exhort the Thessalonian believers, and us, regarding the promise of Yeshua Himself that He would return. In respect to Paul’s warning about end-time deceptions, he will remind them (in v. 25) to stand firm in what he has taught them and not to be dissuaded by that which others are teaching or may have falsely attributed to Paul himself. Moreover, it is likely that those who had rejected Yeshua as the true “Son of God” and the promised Redeemer, were seeking all manner of ways to prove His words to have not been fulfilled, and therefore proving that He was not the promised redeemer but a false promise.

But it is also possible that some, who had professed truly to believe that Yeshua was the promised Messiah, had come to reject that truth but were still gathering together with the believing community. One could imagine someone within the community giving “a prophetic word” or some kind of “Spirit-utterance” indicating that since Yeshua had not returned, it proved Him not to be the promised Messiah.

Now that we have the inspired Scriptures completed and in our possession, we may more fully understand Paul’s admonition here to reinforce what became one the foundational aspects of the protestant reformation, i.e., “*sola scriptura*,” meaning that scriptures are the sole source of authority for faith and practice. Thus, whenever a theological claim is presented as being the divinely given truth, to be accepted as such it must be shown that the Scriptures themselves fully support what is being taught. As we come to know and rely upon the Scriptures as the divinely given “measuring rod” against which all things are to be “measured,” we have sure defense against errant teachings. But we must remember that the enemy is sly and crafty and will do all in his power to defeat the cause of truth. Yet we need not fear, for

By this, love is perfected with us, so that we may have confidence in the day of judgment; because as He is, so also are we in this world. (1Jn 4:17)

Paul’s admonition in our text may indicate that some may have been aware of Yeshua’s promise made to the crowd and apostles in the villages of Caesarea Philippi.

And Yeshua was saying to them, “Truly I say to you, there are some of those who are standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God after it has come with power.” (Mk 9:1)

But rather than referring to His eschatological return, however, it seems clear in Mark’s account that Yeshua was referring to the transfiguration, which is the very next event in Mark’s gospel.

Six days later, Yeshua took with Him Peter and James and John, and brought them up on a high mountain by themselves. And He was transfigured before them and His garments became radiant and exceedingly white, as no launderer on earth can whiten them. (Mk 9:2–3)

Note as well another text which those opposed to Yeshua may have used to “prove” that He is not the true Messiah, for having prophesied the end time tribulation, He states:

Truly I say to you, this generation will not pass away until all these things take place. (Mk 13:30)

However, the Greek word translated “generation” by the NASB (*γενεά*, *genea*), has as its first definition “race, kind.”¹ Thus, the point Yeshua is making is that the Jewish people would be divinely maintained even until the very return of Yeshua.

Note as well a third text in which Yeshua refers to His coming:

But whenever they persecute you in one city, flee to the next; for truly I say to you, you will not finish going through the cities of Israel until the Son of Man comes. (Matt 10:23)

While this text is a bit more difficult to interpret in light of the fact that millennia have passed without Yeshua’s return, there is an insightful explanation that fits the context, and it is this: the noun “you” in the phrase “you will not finish” (*τελέσητε<τελέω*) is obviously plural, and thus can refer not only to the immediate disciples of Yeshua (i.e., the 12) but can also point to those who believe through their testimony and mission. This ultimately includes all who are granted saving faith throughout the remaining time of earth’s history, for it is by the message of the inspired Scriptures, energized and guarded by the Ruach, that faith is granted to all who believe throughout the millennia of time.

1 BDAG, “*γενεά*,” p. 191.

... for it will not come unless the apostasy comes first, – Note first of all that the words “it will not come,” while clearly expressing the message of our verse, are not actually in the Greek itself. Rather, the subject of this phrase in v. 3 is carried over from the final phrase of v. 2, “that the day of the Lord has come.” Thus, Paul’s meaning is obviously that “the day of the Lord will not come unless the apostasy comes first.”

...the apostasy comes first – The word “apostasy” translates the Greek ἀποστασία (*apostasia*) which carries the meaning:

defiance of established system or authority, rebellion, abandonment, breach of faith¹

But the fact that Paul adds the definite article, “the apostasy” (ἡ ἀποστασία, *hei apostasia*), indicates that he is referring to a specific state of apostasy, and in this context, one that includes a “falling away” from genuine faith in Yeshua, a number of greater proportions than normally seen in the history of humankind. Thus, it is this final and ultimate apostasy which marks the “beginning of the end.”

Exactly how this will be recognized is not made clear in our text, nor in other prophetic texts of the Scripture. What is clear, however, is that this “apostasy” will engulf a growing number and will become a dominant force of power or influence in a global sense.

... and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction. – The “man of lawlessness” (ὁ ἄνθρωπος τῆς ἀνομίας) is described in our verse and throughout the following verses. It appears that he will acquire such power so that he will be enabled to have a global impact upon mankind as a whole. How he will do this is not revealed, but it is clear that being called “the man of lawlessness,” he will oppose all that is righteous in God’s eyes and, by having great power, will seek to have the world’s population worship him as the divine power of the universe. He is the “anti-Messiah” who is empowered by the enemy himself.

...the son of destruction –By referring to this “man of lawlessness” as “the son of destruction,” it seems obvious that Paul’s meaning here is that this one will be enabled to set himself forward as the one who must be followed and worshiped, and any who refuse to do so, or seek to give worship to any other “divine being,” will, in one way or another, be put to death. Thus he will be empowered by the enemy (Satan) and is therefore the one spoken of by John in his first epistle:

By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit that confesses that Yeshua Messiah has come in the flesh is from God;

¹ BDAG, ἀποστασία, p. 120.

and every spirit that does not confess Yeshua is not from God; this is the spirit of the antichrist, of which you have heard that it is coming, and now it is already in the world. (1Jn 4:2-3)

That this world-figure will be energized and empowered by the enemy himself, means that he will have demonic power to accomplish his evil tasks. But, of course, he will never be able to take from Yeshua those who are eternally His. Thus, all who are “in Yeshua” need not fear the future, as John goes on to proclaim:

You are from God, little children, and have overcome them; because greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world. (1Jn 4:4)

... who opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship – It is the power given to the “anti-messiah” by the demonic forces that will enable him to stand with power against all who affirm the one true God, Father Son and Spirit. John writes from the perspective of the anti-messiah, for he will deny and utterly challenge the God of scripture, proclaiming Him to be non-existent as well as the Son of God, the Savior, and the Spirit of God.

His initial success will be driven by the evil one himself, empowering him to bring utter chaos upon any who deny him or speak against him. But once again, this should not bring fear upon those who are truly born again, for God has promised to enable all who are His to persevere and to thereby stand as witnesses of God’s love, power, and grace.

The NASB translates “*above every so-called god or object of worship*,” which Paul actually wrote: “all who are called God or an object of worship,” (πάντα λεγόμενον θεόν ἢ σέβασμα). He does so by using language which describes how the anti-messiah erroneously views the Almighty and those who are His.

... so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as being God. – It seems obvious from our text here, that all of this takes place at a time when the ancient Temple in Jerusalem has been fully rebuilt and is a functioning place of worship. Once again, we have no clear chronological or time-frame reference but the presence of the Temple is obvious in our text. We may also note similar language in Daniel’s prophecy describing Antiochus IV Epiphanes, who enacted horrible atrocities against the Jewish people and their religion and thus prefigures the end-time anti-messiah:

Out of one of them came forth a rather small horn which grew

exceedingly great toward the south, toward the east, and toward the Beautiful Land. It grew up to the host of heaven and caused some of the host and some of the stars to fall to the earth, and it trampled them down. It even magnified itself to be equal with the Commander of the host; and it removed the regular sacrifice from Him, and the place of His sanctuary was thrown down. (Dan 8:9–11)

We read in the Apocrypha an account of Antiochus which strengthens the fact that he was, indeed, a foreshadow of the anti-messiah.

And the king [Antiochus] wrote to his whole kingdom that all should be as one people, and every one should abandon his customs. And all the heathen agreed to the commandment of the king. Yea, many of the Israelites found pleasure in his religion, and sacrificed unto idols, and profaned the sabbath. And the king sent letters by messengers unto Jerusalem and the cities of Judah, that they should follow the foreign customs of the land, and keep burnt offerings, and sacrifices, and drink offerings out of the sanctuary; and that they should profane the sabbaths and festival days; and pollute sanctuary and priests; build altars, and groves, and idol temples, and sacrifice swine's flesh, and unclean animals; that they should also leave their sons uncircumcised, make their souls abominable with all manner of uncleanness and profanation: to the end they might forget the law, and change all the ordinances. And whosoever would not do according to the commandments of the king, he should die.

Even as ancient rulers portrayed themselves as divine beings, so the anti-messiah will seek to be accepted as divine by proclaiming himself as God. And there seems to be no doubt that he will be enabled by the evil one and all of his demons.