

The Coming of the Lord and the Rapture of the Church

Are Believers About to Be Evacuated From Earth?

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Summary

The New Testament teaching of the rapture of the church is dear to the heart of the Christian because of the blessed hope we have of being with Messiah and with our loved ones forever. But there is a heated debate in the church about when it will occur in the course of end time events. Conservative, fundamentalist churches around the world have been teaching for several generations a message that says Messiah could come at any time (imminence) and that it must occur before the final period of Great Tribulation which is coming upon the earth (pre-trib).

Our task is to examine the Scriptures, without denominational or theological bias, to ascertain the true message and meaning of the Bible on the topic of the return of Messiah to establish his reign on earth. We have every confidence that the entire Bible, and especially the New Testament, teaches a uniform message on this topic, since the disciples of Messiah were instructed to "**go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you**" (Matthew 28:19-20).

What then did Messiah himself and all his disciples, including Paul, teach about the timing of his coming to rescue his own from the judgment which must take place on the earth to purge the world of sin? The answer to this question is what we will endeavor to discover as we immerse ourselves in the Scriptures.

The Teaching of a Pre-Tribulation Rapture of the Church

But first, a word about the doctrine of the pre-tribulation rapture of the church. Modern pre-tribulation dispensationalists lean primarily upon the fourth chapter of Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians as "proof" and statement of their position. It reads, in the King James Version, as follows:

But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive *and* remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive *and* remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words. (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, KJV)

The underlined phrase, "**shall be caught up**," expresses the idea of the "rapture." (More on this later)

There are several observations that dispensationalists argue from this passage of Scripture. First, nothing is said here by Paul about any intervening events which must take place before his coming to "rapture" the church. So, essentially, the primary argument for a pre-trib rapture is derived from what is not said in this text! It's an argument from silence! Hardly "solid" Scriptural proof. Legitimate interpretive methods usually

come to some conclusion based on what the Bible says. But pre-tribulation rapture teaching derives primarily from what the Bible does NOT say.

Furthermore, this notion of a pre-trib snatching away of the saints is the foundation for the associated doctrine of the "imminent return of Christ" which is usually promoted with the idea that "the rapture can occur at any moment." This makes for great motivational preaching as congregations are compelled to confess sins and make a "decision" for Christ *now* or risk losing the opportunity when Jesus suddenly appears. But, is this really what Paul and others teach about the gathering of the saints at Messiah's coming? Does Paul consistently teach that there are no prerequisite events between now and the coming of Messiah?

Secondly, the term *rapture* actually is never used anywhere in the Bible. The Greek word *harpadzo*, translated "shall be caught up" means **1. to make off w. someone's property by attacking or seizing, steal, carry off, drag away, or 2. to grab or seize suddenly so as to remove or gain control, snatch/take away** (*BDAG Lexicon*). The Latin translation of Thessalonians is the source of the English word *rapture*. And from this word, dispensationalists conclude that believers will be snatched up to heaven.

As we approach the subject of the rapture, we want to closely examine the major Pauline "rapture" texts for clues about his source material for this teaching and for hints about the timing of this event. When will this event occur? Does the Bible teach that the rapture will occur before the tribulation, after the tribulation, or at some other time? Let's dig in and find out.

The Meaning of 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

Since the major rapture text is found in 1 Thessalonians 4, as we pointed out above, why not start here? Indeed, our text provides a great deal of information in what is said, as opposed to dispensationalists who argue primarily for a pre-trib rapture from what is NOT said by Paul. So, we will examine the terminology of the text in light of its common usage at that time to uncover the meaning of Paul. And we will search for the informing texts - Bible passages which Paul may have used to shed light on the topic.

The Noisy and Public Coming of Our Lord Yahusha

According to 1 Thessalonians 4:16, the snatching up of believers in the "rapture" will be a very noisy event. The coming of the Master is described as being accompanied by a loud command, the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet call of Elohim. Certainly the loud shout and the trumpet call are noisy:

For the Master himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of Elohim, and the dead in Messiah will rise first. (1 Thessalonians 4:16)

It would be difficult to imagine the loud command and the trumpet call to be quiet. The text clearly intimates just the opposite of what the pre-trib dispensationalists say. This is significant because pre-tribulation dispensationalists teach that the rapture will be a private event, known and heard only by those who get raptured. But that is a huge stretch from what Paul is describing here.

Complimentary to this description of this very loud and noisy event, the use of the word ***parousia*** (*parousia*), here translated "*coming* (of the Lord)," denotes the same. Anyone who possesses a Greek lexicon can attest to the fact that ***parousia*** (*parousia*) implies the bodily presence or the close physical proximity of an individual at his arrival. Thus, in the New Testament, this word is translated almost exclusively as "coming" or "presence."

parousia (*parousia*) was common in the Greek world of New Testament times, as Adolf Deissman explains:

From the Ptolemaic period down into the 2nd century A.D. we are able to trace the word in the East as a technical expression for the arrival or the visit of the king or emperor (or other persons in authority, or troops). The *parousia* of the sovereign must have been something well known even to the people, as shown by the facts that special payments in kind and taxes to defray the cost of the *parousia* were exacted, that in Greece a new era was reckoned from the *parousia* of the Emperor Hadrian, that all over the world advent-coins were struck after a *parousia* of the emperor, and that we are even able to quote examples of advent sacrifices (*Light From the Ancient East*, cited from William R. Kimball, *The Rapture*, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985, p.139).

The arrival of any dignitary is almost universally a noisy and celebratory event. Likewise, this common use of the word ***parousia*** (*parousia*) to denote the **public appearing** of a dignitary was surely well known by the Thessalonians, to whom Paul described the glorious public arrival of Messiah as the hope of the grieving believers:

According to the Lord's own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming (*parousia*) of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first (1 Thessalonians 4:15,16).

The events attending the Lord's *parousia* - the loud command, the trumpet call and the voice of the angel - together with the well established meaning of *parousia* as the public appearing of a VIP, persuasively suggest that Paul and the Thessalonian believers viewed the *parousia* of the Lord as **a loud, public spectacle, not a quiet, secret rapture** as some theologians have suggested. It is hard to imagine how all of this noise Paul describes could properly depict a secret, private rapture!

If we are seeking to understand the meaning of what Paul is describing here, we should ask ourselves the question, "Where did Paul come into this understanding of the coming of the Master and the rapture of his people?" One way to find out would be to compare the words and images Paul uses to describe this event with other Scriptures where these same words and images are used. As we do so, we come to what should be no surprise to anyone. The Master Yahusha Messiah used these same words and images as he explained to his disciples about his future return.

In his renowned discourse on his future coming, Yahusha himself explained that his *parousia* would be a highly visible, public event which follows a time of great tribulation! When asked by his disciples, "**What will be the sign of your coming (parousia)...**," Yahusha listed a series of events which would take place, including a time of unprecedented distress (tribulation) and persecution of his followers, after which, he said, "**they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory. And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect**" (Matthew 24:30,31). Again, in keeping with the normal meaning and usage of *parousia*, Yahusha describes his coming as a highly visible (on the clouds of the sky) and spectacular (with power and great glory) event.

Then, as if in anticipation of a future false message saying that his *parousia* would be in secret, Yahusha went on to warn his disciples,

if anyone tells you, 'There he is, out in the desert,' do not go out; or, 'Here he is, in the inner rooms,' do not believe it. For as lightning that comes from the east is visible even in the west, so will be the *coming (parousia)* of the Son of Man (Matthew 24:26,27).

Yahusha did not want his disciples in any way to think that his *parousia* might be a quiet event or take place in some secret place or in a private manner. On the contrary, it would be as visible as the lightening in the sky (more about this later...). The fact that Messiah's *parousia* is a public, posttribulational spectacle - not a secret, private event - is rather well established **if Messiah's own testimony is to be given any credence.**

If this is the source of Paul's message about the rapture, then surely he would further indicate the public nature of Messiah's return to rapture his people. And indeed Paul does use the word *parousia* to specifically designate the posttribulational coming of Messiah and links this to the hope of the assembly of believers. In verse 8 of 2 Thessalonians 2, Paul informs us that Yahusha "**will overthrow (the lawless one) with the breath of his mouth and destroy (him) by the splendor of his coming (*parousia*).**" This *parousia* in verse 8 is obviously posttribulational; a point about which even pretribers will not dispute. But Paul had just linked this glorious coming with the hope of the persecuted Thessalonians.

The apostle told them that Yahusha "**will pay back trouble to those who trouble you and give relief to you who are troubled, and to us as well. This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels**" (2 Thessalonians 1:6,7, KJV). Paul goes on to say that the destruction of ungodly unbelievers will happen "**on the day he comes to be glorified in his holy people and to be marveled at among all those who have believed**" (vs.10).

The apostle made reference to the destruction of the troublemakers in general in chapter 1:9, and then to the destruction of that troublemaker in particular in chapter 2:8. In both cases, their destruction will take place at the post tribulation *parousia* of Messiah. Of interest to our research is that Paul states and then repeats that at the same time the unbelievers will be "paid back" with destruction, the believers will be "paid back" rest (vs.6) and enjoy fellowship with Messiah (cf. vs.10). It could hardly be more clear that the believer's hope (i.e., the rapture) will be realized at the post tribulation *parousia* of Messiah, not at a quiet and secret pre tribulation rapture.

The simple straightforwardness of Paul's description of Messiah's *parousia* in 2 Thessalonians 1 and 2 clearly demonstrates the apostle's understanding of the post tribulation coming of Messiah and rapture of the church.

This text is very difficult for pretribers to explain. Some simply downplay the import of Paul's rationale here. John F. Walvoord, a champion of pretribulationism, for example, merely sidesteps the problems this passage creates for his view and concludes that chapter 1 "does not contribute to the debate over the Tribulation"! (*The Rapture Question* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979), p.237.) He explains that the Thessalonians and their persecutors all died without seeing the return of Yahusha. So, he reasons, Paul could not have been holding out the post tribulation *parousia* of Messiah as the believer's hope, because those believers were not rescued by the second advent! (*The Rapture Question*, p.236.) But Walvoord's reasoning is utter nonsense!

The hope which Paul offered the Thessalonians was truly comforting to them and to all believers who have read his words - if we are to take his writing at face value. The Lord will repay his faithful ones with rest from their enemies and with fellowship with him when he comes at his posttribulational *parousia*. By this promise, the Christian really is encouraged and motivated to serve Messiah. So we see that Paul very specifically describes the *parousia* of Messiah as a public, posttribulational event, just as Yahusha Himself had described his *parousia*

And the remainder of the New Testament is in harmony with the testimony of Yahusha - which is just what we would expect! William R. Kimball insightfully discusses

further evidence in II Peter proving that the *parousia* is not a secret, mysterious evacuation of the church seven years prior to Christ's coming in judgment. According to the apostle Peter, "The promise of his coming (*parousia*)" will be consummated upon a scoffing world when "the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat"(II Peter 3:4-10). In the immediate context of this revelation, Peter exhorts us to be "looking for and hastening unto the coming (*parousia*) of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat" (II Peter 3:11,12). A candid examination of these facts conclusively demonstrates that the word *parousia* has nothing whatsoever to do with a supposed secret presence, arrival, or appearance of Christ in the form of an invisible rapture. (William R. Kimball, *The Rapture*, pp 140,141)

Of special interest to us is Peter's use of the metaphor of the thief in the night. This metaphor is not original with Peter. Simon Peter actually borrowed it from Messiah. Yahusha compared his own future coming (*parousia*) to the coming of a thief at night:

Therefore, keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come. But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what time of night the thief was coming, he would have kept watch and would not have let his house be broken into. So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him (Matthew 24:42-44).

The fact that Peter describes the inauguration of the day of God with the same metaphor which Messiah used with reference to his posttribulational *parousia* will convince the unbiased reader that Peter held out that same *parousia* Yahusha spoke about as the hope of the believing church.

In light of the evidence of the normal meaning of the word *parousia* and its usage in the New Testament by Yahusha, Paul and Peter, we are compelled to conclude that the coming (*parousia*) of our Lord Yahusha

Messiah, to which Paul referred in 1 Thessalonians 4:17 and 2 Thessalonians 2:1 was understood by the Thessalonians as that time when Yahusha would appear in glory **after** the great tribulation to judge the world when he is to come to reward those who love him. (Other occurrences of the word *parousia* used in reference to the coming of Messiah are in 1 Corinthians 15:23; 1 Thessalonians 2:19; 3:13; 5:23; James.5:7,8; 2 Peter 1:16; 1 John.2:28.)

The "Snatching Away" (Rapture) - Our Being Gathered To Him

Not only does Paul's use of the term *parousia* and the attending loud noises he describes indicate a public, post tribulation appearing of Messiah and rapture of the church, the very Greek word used by Paul about the rapture does so too. As we pointed out above, the Greek word *harpadzo*, translated "shall be caught up" in 1 Thessalonians 4:17 means **1. to make off w. someone's property by attacking or seizing, steal, carry off, drag away, or 2. to grab or seize suddenly so as to remove or gain control, snatch/take away** (*BDAG Lexicon*). These are terms which usually describe the actions of a thief!

The *BDAG Lexicon* goes on to point out that the substantive form (noun form) of this verb is translated *robber* or *swindler*! With this understanding in mind, it makes perfect sense that Paul utilized this particular word, if indeed, he were merely repeating the teaching of the Master Messiah about his coming. Yahusha compared his sudden coming with *the coming of a thief* in the night! He said,

But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what time of night the thief was coming, he would have kept watch and would not have let his house be broken into. So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him. (Matthew 24:43-44).

Thus, Paul was using the same metaphor to describe the suddenness of the gathering event as Messiah used when he told his disciples about his post tribulation return.

Paul, furthermore, links the "*parousia* of our Lord Jesus Christ" and "our being gathered to him" in 2 Thessalonians 2:1 just as he linked the *parousia* of Messiah with the "snatching up together" (rapture) of believers in 1 Thessalonians 4. Therefore, we can easily see that the phrase, "our being gathered to him," is an unmistakable reference to the rapture of the church.

The noun which Paul employs here, *episunagwgh* (*episunagogee*), which is translated "being gathered," occurs only once more in the New Testament, while the cognate verb, *episunagw* (*episunago*), occurs 7 times in the New Testament. A survey of these texts provides us with important clues to the meaning this word carries with it, without which we might be sure to misunderstand the apostle.

James Moffatt notes that the cognate verb, *episunagw* (*episunago*), "to gather together", was "already in use for the muster of saints to the messianic reign" in Paul's day. ("*The First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians*", in *The Expositor's Greek Testament, Vol.4* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), p.47) Yahusha Himself had employed this verb three times in his lamentation over Jerusalem, when he cried out, "**How often I longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings**" (Matthew 23:37; see also its parallel in Lk.13:34). This desire of Messiah to gather Jerusalem's children has obvious eschatological overtones. It

alludes to the messianic expectation that the Old Testament Scriptures fostered.

The Greek translation of the Old Testament (the Septuagint) uses this verb to denote the re-gathering of the dispersed Jews into the land of Israel (see, for example, 2 Maccabees 2:7.) One such prophecy about the re-gathering of the dispersed is found in Isaiah, who foretold the future gathering of God's people at the sounding of a great trumpet:

In that day the Lord will thresh from the flowing Euphrates to the Wadi of Egypt, and you, O Israelites, will be gathered up one by one. And in that day a great trumpet will sound. Those who were perishing in Assyria and those who were exiled in Egypt will come and worship the Lord on the holy mountain in Jerusalem (Isaiah 27:12,13; see also 40:11; 56:8; Ezekiel 36:24).

This prophecy is an "informing text" to the teaching of Yahusha cited above. By his use of the metaphor of the hen **gathering** her chicks, Yahusha was expressing his intention to personally fulfill this and other Old Testament prophecies by **gathering** together all of God's people to himself at his *parousia*.

The verb *episunagw* (*episunago*) occurs two more times in an even more explicit last days context. (Yet two other occurrences of this verb are in Mk.1:33; Lk.12:1) It appears in the Olivet Discourse and in its parallel in Mark 13:27. In response to the disciples' question, "**What will be the sign of your coming**" (Matthew 24:3), Yahusha explained that a series of events must happen first, including a great tribulation and heavenly disturbances, after which, Yahusha said, "**they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory. And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather (*episunagw*, *episunago*) **his elect from the four winds**" (Matthew 24:30,31). Here, the longing of Yahusha to gather Jerusalem's 'chicks' will finally be realized. And clearly, this gathering of God's people (his elect) after the great tribulation is the fulfillment of the prophecy in Isaiah.**

Thus, the usage of the verb *episunagw* (*episunago*) in the New Testament almost exclusively contains links or references, either implicit or explicit, to the gathering of God's people at the end time in fulfillment of prophecy. It would not be surprising then if the noun *episunagooee* made reference to that same gathering of God's people at the end of the age. And, of course, this is just what we find.

The first occurrence of the noun, *episunagooee*, is in 2 Thessalonians 2:1, which is one of the texts we are examining. (We will return to this text momentarily.) The second and only other occurrence of the noun appears in Hebrews 10:25 and is set in the backdrop of the coming of the day of the Lord. The writer of Hebrews is encouraging his readers not to stop **meeting together** (*episunagooee*) as others have done but to continue to encourage one another in view of the soon arrival of the day of the Lord.

The verb which is usually used in the New Testament to denote the gathering together of people is *sunago*, and its corresponding noun is *sunagooee*, which is translated "synagogue," or "gathering." These are the root words of the two words we have been examining. To the root words is merely added the preposition *epi*. But the apostle, while writing his letter to the Hebrews, does not employ the usual word to denote this meeting. Instead, he uses *episunagooee* to refer to the meeting of these Hebrew Christians. This was no mistake by the writer. It seems rather to have been intentional.

Upon reflection, his purpose in employing *episunagooee* instead of *sunagooee* here is clever. The apostle

wanted his readers to equate the weekly Sabbath worship meeting with that greater Sabbatical meeting which all believers will have with Messiah at his *parousia*. **Evidently, the weekly gathering (meeting) of Christians (cf. Heb.10:25) for fellowship and mutual edification is a thumbnail picture and a prophetic type of the future gathering (cf. 2 Thessalonians 2:1) of all believers for fellowship with Messiah at his *parousia*.**

When we take the context of messianic expectation with which the words *episunagw* (*episunago*) and *episunagogee* are saturated, and bring it to the text of 2 Thessalonians 2:1, we can begin to understand Paul's portrayal of the rapture. The relationship between the **gathering** which Yahusha spoke of in the Olivet Discourse and the **gathering** which Paul has written about in 2 Thessalonians 2 is the crucial point of this discussion. For Paul, the coming of Messiah and the gathering of his people are viewed not just as being closely related in time, but in fact, they are seen as simultaneous events.

Now the other primary text in the New Testament where the coming of Messiah and the gathering of his people are presented as taking place in proximity is in the discourse of Yahusha in Matthew 24. The *parousia* of Messiah, according to Yahusha in Matthew 24, will not precede, but will follow the great tribulation. And the **gathering** of the elect saints occurs in conjunction with this post tribulation appearing of Yahusha. Since Paul links these two events, it becomes quite evident that the apostle has in mind the very same *parousia* of Messiah and gathering of saints which Yahusha spoke of. So we conclude that the rapture to which Paul is referring in 1 Thessalonians 4 must be a post tribulation phenomenon.

According to the Lord's Own Word

There is further evidence in his first letter to the Thessalonians 4 which supports our previous findings that Paul's teaching about the rapture is essentially synonymous with the teaching of Yahusha as recorded in Matthew 24. In response to the saints who were deeply grieved over the death of their loved ones, Paul is careful to appeal to the authoritative teaching of Messiah as a means of encouraging these believers. Paul's exhortation is "**according to the Lord's own word**" (1 Thessalonians 4:15):

For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. (1 Thessalonians 4:15-17)

This appeal could mean only one of two things: either Paul is sharing a direct, private revelation that the Lord gave him, or he is reiterating the public teaching of Yahusha, the substance of which is preserved for us in the Gospels. Dispensational theology stands by the former theory. Evidence to support the theory of a private Pauline revelation is based primarily around a peculiar interpretation of Galatians 1:15-19, where Paul maintains that when God called him to be an apostle, he did not go to any of the other apostles for council. This, they claim, is proof that Paul's message is not based on the public sayings of Messiah. Instead, they

maintain, all of his own doctrine was a result of direct, private revelation Paul received.

This theory fails, however, because it does not take into account a wide variety of pertinent facts. First, it was a custom for devout Jews to be present in Jerusalem three times each year, according to a certain commandment of God in the law of Moses, for the celebration of the annual feasts. Jews and God-fearing Gentiles from all over the world faithfully kept this custom. Since Paul is a self-ascribed Pharisee of Pharisees, it is highly likely that he visited Jerusalem regularly and had firsthand knowledge of the sayings and teachings of Yahusha who taught openly in the temple courts.

Second, even if Paul had not heard Yahusha in person, he surely knew of his teachings, because the sayings of Yahusha were well known among 1st century Christians. Third, Paul was a highly educated man and the leader of the persecutors of the Way. It would be very strange indeed if this well-educated leader knew nothing about the teachings of the man whom he made it his personal quest to vehemently oppose.

The fourth reason we reject this theory is that the Christian church was built around the life and teachings of Yahusha. Paul could not have avoided the sayings and teachings of Messiah and still be a credible apostle. Fifth, Paul elsewhere attributes his authoritative teaching to the sayings of Yahusha (more about this in a moment). Sixth, even where Paul does not name Yahusha as his source, there is enough verbal and contextual evidence to deduce that his teaching is based on what Yahusha said publicly. And seventh, why would Messiah have revealed privately to Paul something (i.e., a pre tribulation rapture) that contradicted his own public teaching about his future coming? Clearly, this would have been a conflict of interests. For these reasons, it is deemed impossible that Paul's teaching about the last days was based solely on the visions and private revelations he received.

The second theory of the two is much more plausible. The phrase "**according to the Lord's own word**" must refer to the oral teaching of the Master that has been transmitted to us in the Gospels. There are three solid reasons for adhering to this theory. First, an appeal to the oral tradition of Yahusha would have been more reassuring and comforting to the Thessalonians than would have the revelations given privately to the apostle. It's as if Paul was saying to those grieving saints, "Don't take my word for it. Look to what Yahusha himself said about his coming and the resurrection of the saints." So the comfort with which Paul was consoling them was not his own, but **the comfort that comes from the knowledge of Yahusha's own authoritative word.**

Second, Paul has shown elsewhere in his writings a tendency to credit the Master Yahusha Messiah for the teaching which he is sharing. Much like a writer uses footnotes to give credit to a source from which he has borrowed, Paul gives credit for his teaching to the Lord Yahusha, who is the source of that teaching. Thus, Paul must be appealing to the known sayings of Messiah because he used a similar appeal to the Lord's teaching in 1 Corinthians, where he explicitly referred to Messiah's own words.

That Yahusha spoke a definitive word to the issue of divorce is clear in Mathew 5:31,32; and 19:2-12, even though he did not exhaust that subject. New Testament scholar Gordon D. Fee points out that

on the question of divorce Paul says, "not I, but the Lord" (1 Cor. 7:10), meaning Jesus himself spoke to that question. But to the question raised in a Greek environment as to whether a believer should divorce a pagan partner, Jesus apparently had no occasion to speak. The problem simply lay outside His own Jewish culture. But Paul did have to speak to it, so he said "I, not the Lord" (v. 12). (Fee, Gordon D. & Stuart, Douglas. *How To Read The*

In a similar vein, the phrase, "**according to the Lord's own word,**" is another way Paul gives credit to the oral teaching of Yahusha on the subject of the gathering of the saints. And this word of Messiah is found in Matthew 24.

The third reason we are convinced that the phrase, "**according to the Lord's own word**" refers to the oral teachings of the Master is that there are numerous verbal affinities and contextual similarities between specific Gospel texts and sections of Paul's letters. These verbal parallels indicate that Messiah's discourse is the source of Paul's explanation of the rapture in 1 Thessalonians 4:13ff. There are nearly a dozen such parallels between the sayings of Yahusha and Paul's "rapture" text. Let's go over these verbal parallels in detail.

First, as we have already explained, Yahusha's discourse was spoken in reply to his disciple's question regarding the time of his coming (*parousia*, Matthew 24:3). Paul's exhortation is also centered on the *parousia* of Messiah (1 Thessalonians 4:15). Second, Yahusha placed the *gathering* of his elect in conjunction with his post tribulation *parousia* (Matthew 24:31). Paul, too, describes the "catching up together" (i.e., "gathering") of the saints at the time of Messiah's *parousia* (1 Thessalonians 4:17). He does so by utilizing a verb which implies the actions of a thief (*harpadzo*, "to snatch away"), just as Messiah used the metaphor of a thief in the night to convey the suddenness and unexpectedness of his coming.

Third, Yahusha said he would be seen coming on the clouds of the sky (Matthew 24:30). Paul stated that "**the Lord himself will come down from heaven...**," and believers will be taken up "**in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air**" (1 Thessalonians 4:16,17). Fourth, Yahusha mentions the angels as assisting him (Matthew 24:31). Likewise, Paul notes the voice of the archangel (vs.16), and implies angelic assistance in the "catching up" of the saints (note the passive, "caught up," v.17, Gr. *arpaghsomeqa*, *harpageesometha*).

A fifth verbal parallel is that Yahusha and Paul both mention the sounding of a trumpet (1 Thessalonians 4:16 and Matthew 24:31). Sixth, both of them discuss the unexpectedness of Messiah's *parousia*. Yahusha told his disciples, "**Keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come**" (Matthew 24:42). He then compares the unexpectedness of his coming to the coming of a **thief in the night**. Paul assumes his readers knowledge of Messiah's words when he tells them, "About times and dates, we do not need to write to you, for you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night" (1 Thessalonians 5:1,2).

Another similarity of speech between the discourses of Messiah and Paul is explained by James Moffatt. Regarding the "labor pains of a pregnant woman" (1 Thessalonians 5:3), he notes that

The saying of Jesus which is echoed here has been preserved in Luke xii.39 [the thief was coming] and xxi.34 [and that day will close on you unexpectedly like a trap], but the common original seems to have been in Aramaic or Hebrew (so Prof. Marshall, *Exp.*ii.73 f.), since Paul's [as labor pains] and Luke's [like a trap] must reflect a phrase like [(c)hvl], which might be rendered either as [hevel] (snare) or as [havel] (travail), the latter echoing the well-known conception of [the beginning of birth pains]. (*Moffatt, James. "The First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians", in The Expositor's Greek Testament, Vol.4. Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, Mich., 1983. p.9.*)

Still another parallel is found where Paul says that "they will not **escape**" the destruction that will come upon them (1

Thessalonians 5:3). This, too, is an echo of Yahusha's exhortation to his disciples to "be always on the watch and pray that you may be able to **escape** all that is about to happen" (Lk.21:36).

And finally, Paul mimics Messiah three more times in his word to the Messianic assembly in chapter 5 of 1 Thessalonians. He encourages his friends to "**be alert and self-controlled**" (Gr. *grhgwrew, greegoreo* and *nhfw, neepho*, v.6) in view of that coming day of judgment, just as Yahusha urged his listeners to "**keep watch,...you also must be ready** (Gr., *grhgwrew, greegoreo*)" (Matthew 24:42,44). Yahusha then goes on to relate by way of parable the case of a man who was not ready or self-controlled: That man had noticed how long his master was delayed and "**begins to beat his fellow servants and to eat and drink with drunkards**" (Matthew 24:49). Luke, in his account of this parable (12:45), says that the man began to eat and drink and get drunk (Gr. *nequskw, methusko*). Likewise, Paul stresses the importance of remaining alert and self-controlled and not "getting drunk" (5:7,8) in view of Messiah's surprise return.

If there had been only a couple of verbal similarities between Messiah's sermon and Paul's writing about the rapture, we might have dismissed them as coincidental. But in light of the fact that there are many striking parallels, and that Paul attributes the substance of his teaching to Yahusha's own word, can there be any more doubt that Messiah's Olivet Discourse is the primary source of information Paul used to teach the Thessalonians about the posttribulational coming (*parousia*) of Yahusha and rapture of the church?

Verbal Parallels Between 1 Thessalonians 4-5 and Matthew 24

The following table summarizes why we must understand Paul's message in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:11 as being the exact same message Messiah Yahusha spoke regarding his second coming which is recorded for us in Matthew 24 and Luke 21.

The Lord's Own Word (Matthew 24 and Parallels)	"According to the Lord's Own Word" (1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:11)
"What will be the sign of your <u>coming</u> (<u>parousia</u>)?" 24:3	"... till the <u>coming</u> (<u>parousia</u>) of the Lord" 4:15
"... and they will <u>gather</u> his elect" 24:31	"we will be <u>caught up together</u> with them"
"at what time of night <u>the thief</u> was coming" 24:43	"we will be <u>caught up together</u> with them" (Greek <i>harpadzo</i>, "<u>to seize, grab, snatch</u>" - the actions of a thief!)
"<u>coming on the clouds of the sky</u>" 24:30	"<u>in the clouds</u> to meet the Lord <u>in the air</u>" 4:17
"he will send <u>his angels</u>" 24:31	"will be <u>caught up</u> (<u>passive</u>)" 4:17 "voice of the <u>archangel</u>" 4:16
"with a loud <u>trumpet call</u>" 24:31	"with the <u>trumpet call</u> of God" 4:16

"on what day your Lord will come... at what time of <u>night the thief was coming</u> " 24:42,43	"The day of the Lord will <u>come like a thief in the night</u> " 5:2
"unexpectedly like a trap" Luke 21:34	"suddenly, as labor pains" 5:3
"you may be able to <u>escape</u> " Luke 21:36	"they will not <u>escape</u> " 5:3
"keep watch (Gr. grhgwrew greegoreo)" 24:42	"be alert (Gr. grhgwrew greegoreo)" 5:6
(no self-control) 24:48-51	"and self-controlled" 5:6
"drink with <u>drunkards</u> " 24:49	
"and <u>get drunk</u> " Luke 12:45	"Those who <u>get drunk</u> " 5:7

By comparing the verbal affinities (the use of the same words and phrases while writing about the same subject) between these passages of Holy Writ, it is evident that Paul used all the same words, phrases, figures of speech and themes when speaking about the "rapture of the church" as Messiah used when he was teaching about his post tribulation coming. Therefore, we can confidently conclude that Paul's rapture message is the same message Messiah delivered to his apostles as recorded in Matthew 24.

We have seen that the word Paul chose to employ to depict the coming of Messiah (**parousia**), combined with the attending circumstances of the coming (the trumpet call, the loud command and the voice of the archangel), argues strongly that Yahusha's coming will be a spectacular public event, visible to all. And we have noted that the "gathering" of God's people will take place at that same post tribulation **parousia** of Messiah. Paul accordingly credits the very word of Yahusha as the authoritative source for his teaching about Messiah's coming and the rapture. Shouldn't we, too, take Paul's writings at face value and believe that the post tribulation coming of Messiah is when he will rapture his church?

The Meaning of 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12

The second great exposition of the coming of Messiah and the "rapture" of the church is found in 2 Thessalonians 2. This text is well known to many, particularly the King James Version of it, which reads as follows:

Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him, That ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand. Let no man deceive you by any means: for *that day shall not come*, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God.

Remember ye not, that, when I was yet with you, I told you these things? And now ye know what withholdeth that he might be revealed in his time. For the mystery of

iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth *will let*, until he be taken out of the way. And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming: *Even him*, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness. (2 Thessalonians 2:1-12, KJV)

Since the topic of 2 Thessalonians 2 is, in the words of Paul himself, "**concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to him,**" our first task is to find out what Paul had in mind and what his readers understood by this "coming" and "gathering." By doing so, we will obtain some informative insights into the timing of the rapture. An important clue to his meaning is given where Paul asserted that his teaching about the rapture of the church is "**according to the the Lord's own word**" (1 Thessalonians 4:15). Thus, by following this hint, we are led to further examine and compare the Olivet Discourse (the Lord's own word) with 2 Thessalonians 2 to discern whether or not Paul's oral teaching to the Thessalonian believers as described in his second letter to them really is an exact replica of the teaching of Messiah in Matthew 24.

Prophetic Prerequisites to the Coming of Messiah

In 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, which according to pretribulation rapture advocates is the single most important New Testament passage on the rapture, we have discovered that Paul used the vocabulary of Matthew 24 to describe the coming of Messiah and its attendant "rapture" of the church. But in that portion of Paul's letter, there is no mention of any prophetic events which must be fulfilled before the rapture. Pretribulation rapture advocates take this as positive proof that the rapture must come before the time of great tribulation because the events of the tribulation are signs of the second advent of Yahusha. Since Paul apparently mentions no signs which will precede the rapture, they conclude that the rapture of 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 is a pretribulation phenomenon.

However, that argument from silence is meaningless if we can show from other Scriptures that there will be certain key historical events before the rapture. The purpose of Paul's writing of 1 Thessalonians 4 was not to delineate end time events in chronological order, but to comfort the saints who were grieving over the loss of their loved ones. Therefore, there was no reason for explaining in detail all that would occur before the rapture. Paul only needed to state the fact of the coming of Messiah and the rapture of all dead and living saints. The fact of the "rapture" event is the comfort Paul offers, and the purpose for his letter is served by merely reminding the Thessalonian believers of that blessed hope.

Nevertheless, some theologians still insist that Paul would have explained more precisely what would happen before the rapture, if he were teaching the posttribulation view. For example, John Walvoord, one of the dispensationalists greatest proponents and apologists for the pre-trib rapture theory argues that

it would seem, if the posttribulation view were correct, that this would have been a good

time for Paul to explain that, as a matter of fact, the Rapture could not occur soon and that at least a seven- year period would intervene, including the Great Tribulation, before they could expect the fulfillment of the hope of the Lord's return. (*The Rapture Question*, p.212)

It is rather ironic that Walvoord, and other pretribulation rapture advocates after him, would follow this line of argumentation, because that is **exactly** what Paul went on to do in his second letter to the Thessalonians. The apostle's first letter states the fact of the rapture which is a reassuring comfort to believers who had lost some of their loved ones. But the occasion of his second letter made it necessary for Paul to state emphatically that there were to be certain key events which must happen before the rapture.

The Thessalonians were confused and upset by some false information they had received which reported that the day of the Lord had come. Paul's unequivocal response to this disinformation was this:

Concerning the coming of our Lord Yahusha Messiah and our being gathered to him... Don't let anyone deceive you in any way, for that day will not come until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed.... Don't you remember that when I was with you I used to tell you these things? (2 Thessalonians 2:1,3,5).

The clarity of Paul's instruction here should put to rest forever any leftover doubts about when the rapture will take place. To paraphrase, Paul's is stating emphatically that the coming of Messiah to gather his people cannot occur until two very significant events take place first. The apostasy and the revelation of the lawless ones - two events which every dispensationalist places during the final seven year Great Tribulation - must occur before Messiah comes to gather his people.

Paul couldn't state it any more plainly or clearly. These two events which, by their own admission, occur during the Great Tribulation, must happen before the gathering of the saints at Messiah's coming. Thus the rapture **MUST** be a post-tribulation event. The pretribulation rapture theory is delivered a death blow by Paul himself in 2 Thessalonians 2:1,3,5. There is no longer any reason for saying that Paul teaches a "no intervening signs before the rapture" message as most pretribulationists claim, because he has done just the opposite in this passage. He plainly and emphatically states that these two great tribulation events - the apostasy and the revelation of the man of lawlessness - must happen before the rapture of the church.

The Great Apostasy (the Falling Away from the True Faith)

In 2 Thessalonians 2:3, Paul says that an *apostasia* must occur before the coming of the Master and our gathering to him. What is this *apostasia*? The Greek word can mean any of the following: **defiance of established system or authority, rebellion, abandonment, breach of faith; or (1) apostasy, rebellion; (2) defection, abandonment**. Nearly all the Greek lexicons list apostasy, rebellion, or abandonment as the meaning of this word.

Nevertheless, pre tribulation dispensationalists want desperately to see their scenario of a pre trib rapture in these verses. So, they say that *apostasia* can be translated as "departure." Thus, they conclude that the "departure" or "rapture" must occur first before the revelation of the man of lawlessness and therefore, before

the return of Messiah at his 2nd advent. This is their "proof text" from 2 Thessalonians 2 that the rapture is a pretribulation phenomenon.

J. Vernon McGee attempts to impose the rapture into this word by suggesting that two types of falling away will take place in the end times. The organized church will fall away in apostasy and the true church will fall away or depart from the earth in the rapture. So, the departure of the true church, in his view, leads to the total apostatizing of the organized church. (*I and II Thessalonians* (Pasadena: Thru The Bible Books, 1978), p.120)

Leon J. Wood also argues that this falling away is the rapture because, according to Wood, Paul had not yet been concerned about the apostasy of faith, but was primarily concerned about the second coming. "This provides most convincing evidence for pretribulationism, because Paul would be stating directly that the rapture will precede the tribulation period." (*The Bible and Future Events*, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1973, p.88)

The hard facts, however, dictate against such fairytale interpretations. In classical literature, *apostasia* was used in the negative sense of "treason" or "rebellion" against the ruler. In the Septuagint, this word conveyed the idea of unfaithfulness toward God. Its primary meaning, then, is "to be unfaithful to," or "to abandon," or even "to deny something or someone." (Paul Ellingworth and Eugene A. Nida, *A Translator's Handbook on Paul's Letters to the Thessalonians*, Stuttgart: United Bible Societies, 1975, p.163)

Even most pretribulationists admit that Paul is talking about a departure from the faith. Charles C. Ryrie suggests that the departure can be from the Word of God, or from Christian doctrine or even from God himself. He defines apostasy as "a departure from truth previously accepted, involving the breaking of a professed relationship with God." (*Dispensationalism Today*, Chicago: Moody, 1965, p.151)

A survey of the usage of this Greek word in the New Testament unearths some surprising results for pre tribulation dispensationalists. Since the apostles and elders of the infant Messianic assembly taught Jewish and Gentile believers to obey the Torah (even though keeping the Torah is not a condition of salvation, but rather, it is an appropriate lifestyle change in keeping with one's salvation experience), we would expect to find biblical evidence that the New Testament believers did, indeed, keep the Torah. Acts 21 presents evidence that this is the case. And it is certainly ironic that this account also provides us with some important insights into what the inspired writer Luke understood by the term *apostasy*.

Not long after the Council meeting of the elders and apostles at Jerusalem, the apostle Paul was compelled by the Holy Spirit to return there. There were some unbelieving Jews who desired to kill Paul because of the work he had accomplished for the cause of Christ. When Paul arrived, the elders of the church told him,

You see, brother, how many thousands of Jews have believed, and all of them are zealous for the law. They have been informed that you teach all the Jews who live among the Gentiles to turn away (Greek word for *apostatize*) from Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children or live according to our customs... (Acts 21:20-21).

Their advise to Paul was to undergo a ritual of purification with some other men so that **"everybody will know there is no truth in these reports about you, but that you yourself are living in obedience to the law"** (Acts 21:24).

Two key principles may be deduced from this text. The first is that faith in Messiah does not abrogate one's

responsibility to obey the Torah, nor should conversion chill the believer's attitude toward the Torah. On the contrary, faith in Messiah enhances the desire of the believer to obey Elohim's Torah. The conversion of those "**many thousand Jews**" heightened their enthusiasm for keeping the commandments which were written down by Moses. All of them were "**zealous for the law.**" As we mentioned before, the Torah is not oppressive. It is a law code which grants freedom to those who live by it. Those sincere converts were delighted to obey the Torah because they now knew in a personal way the author of that Torah and his loving intention for giving them his Torah.

Furthermore, Paul himself was living in obedience to the Torah. The rumors being spread about him, that he taught Jews to turn away from Moses, were simply not true. Paul had a great respect for the Torah as we have already discussed in detail, and he taught Jews and Gentiles alike to conform to the rules of the faith. The elders testify here that Paul was not guilty of breaking the Torah as his adversaries had accused him. Likewise, many Christians today hold to the view that Paul endorses the believer's freedom from obedience to the Torah. But to take such a distorted view is to willingly ignore a great deal of evidence to the contrary.

And the second principle we wish to draw out of Acts 21 is that to fall away from obedience to the Torah is to commit apostasy. Paul's enemies were saying that Paul was teaching "**all the Jews...to turn away from Moses**" (v.21). The Greek word here translated *to turn away* is *apostasia*, which means "apostasy." This word occurs twice in the New Testament. In its only other occurrence in 2 Thessalonians 2:3, Paul relates that before Christ will return to gather his church, an apostasy will occur and the man of lawlessness will be revealed. Apostasy, as we discovered above, is a "turning away" or "falling away" from the faith. Thus, Paul's adversaries were actually accusing him of apostasy because he had allegedly "fallen away" from the Torah of Moses.

More to the point, just as the "apostasy from Moses" which Paul was accused of is directly related to breaking the Torah, the apostasy of the last days is also directly related to breaking the Torah (i.e. "lawlessness"). Could it be that the apostasy of the end times is a change of the believer's attitude toward the Torah of Elohim? After all, the prophet Daniel did say that the latter day king would "**attempt to change the set times and the laws**" (7:25). Just as apostasy from Moses meant to abandon his Torah, so apostasy in the last days is the abandoning of Elohim's Torah.

Paul speaks of this end time apostasy in several other places in his writings. He used the cognate verb *to apostatize* twice. In 1 Timothy 4:1, Paul informs his understudy that "**the Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith (Gr. *aposteesontai*) and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons.**" And in Hebrews 3:12, Paul exhorts his readers to "**see to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away (Gr. *aposteenai*) from the living God.**"

The reader will probably not be surprised to find out that Paul's knowledge of this end time apostasy is based upon the teaching of Yahusha. As our Lord Yahusha was warning his disciples not to be fooled by false prophets and false Messiahs who would appear before his *parousia*, Messiah declared that

at that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other, and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people. Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold (Matthew 24:10-12).

This, the Lord Yahusha said, must happen before his coming on the clouds with a loud trumpet call to gather (rapture)

his chosen followers.

Milton S. Terry, an acknowledged expert on hermeneutics, perceived this relationship between Paul's apostasy and the Lord's discourse:

As for the apostasy, why should any one imagine it to be other than that going astray of many, of which the Lord spoke repeatedly in his eschatological sermon (Matt. xxiv, 5,11,12,24). He foretold how the love of many would wax cold; false Christs and false prophets would arise, and faith in the true Messiah would be painfully deficient at the coming of the Son of man (Luke xviii,8). There can be little serious doubt that the falling away spoken of by our Lord and Paul's apostasy are one and the same event.

How frightening that we see just this in the "Bible-believing" churches across America. No one, it seems, is willing to keep Elohim's Torah! And nobody wants anyone else to think he is keeping it! Why is the holy, righteous and spiritual Torah of Elohim so scorned by people who call themselves "Christians"? The only reason conceivable is that Satan has lured the Christian Church into *the apostasy* of the last days! And the sting of this deception is that almost no one is wise to what Satan has done. Believers in Christ actually don't know that they are presently caught up in the devil's snare. They have drifted away from Elohim's good and acceptable and perfect will for them by turning a deaf ear to his commandments which are delineated in specific terms in the Old Testament.

We have thus far discovered four distinct verbal affinities between the Olivet Discourse and 2 Thessalonians 2. Both texts speak of the loud, public *parousia* of Messiah. Both texts describe the gathering of the saints in conjunction with that *parousia*. Both passages refer to that event as the day of the Lord and compare its arrival to the coming of a thief in the night. And both Yahusha and Paul insist that there will be a great falling away from the faith as delineated in the Torah of Moses before the coming of Messiah. Could it be that Paul's major informing text for his writing in 2 Thessalonians 2 is the Olivet Discourse? Kennedy says that "it is no exaggeration to say that Matthew XXIV is the most instructive commentary on the chapter before us (2 Thess. ii)." (Kennedy is quoted in a footnote in George Milligan, *St.Pauls Epistles to the Thessalonians*, Minneapolis: Klock & Klock, 1980, p.lxi)

The Man of Lawlessness

The second event which Paul taught must happen before the Master's coming and our gathering unto him is the revelation of the man of lawlessness. Paul explains that

that day will not come until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the man doomed to destruction. He will oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshipped, so that he sets himself up in God's temple, proclaiming himself to be God (vss.3,4).

The major Old Testament contributor to our understanding of this lawless one is the prophet Daniel. The self-exaltation of this man was envisioned by Daniel who saw a king who will arise in the latter days who

will exalt and magnify himself above every god and will say unheard-of things against the God of gods.... He will show no regard for the gods of his fathers or for the one desired by women, nor will he regard any god, but will exalt himself above them all (Dan.11:36,37).

Daniel also described the fate of this "man doomed to destruction" (2 Thessalonians 2:3): **"Yet he will come to his end, and no one will help him"** (Dan.11:45). And **"he will be destroyed, but not by human power"** (Dan.8:25). Paul later reiterates this truth of the fate of that man **"whom the Lord Yahusha will overthrow with the breath of his mouth and destroy by the splendor of his coming"** (2 Thessalonians 2:8).

In the Olivet Discourse and its parallels, Yahusha also foretells of this person when he warned his disciples,

When you see standing in the holy place 'the abomination that causes desolation,' spoken of through the prophet Daniel - let the reader understand - then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains (Matthew 24:15,16).

And in order to help his listeners understand who he was speaking of, Yahusha named the prophet Daniel as the writer who discussed this subject.

Most commentators recognize this relationship between Daniel and Matthew 24 and the relationship between Daniel and 2 Thessalonians 2. But biblical scholarship has not heretofore recognized the significance of the relationship between Matthew 24 and 2 Thessalonians 2. Whereas it is commonly known that each is dependent on Daniel's prophecies, few writers have explored the unmistakable harmony between Paul's message and the sayings of Yahusha.

Few would dispute that Paul is describing in chapter 2 the same individual Daniel spoke of. Paul calls him the "man of lawlessness," and Daniel refers to him as "the king" or the "king of the north." Paul uses the term lawlessness (Gr. *anomia*) to summarize that man's character (2 Thessalonians 2:3). And Daniel says of him that "He will exalt and magnify himself above every god and will say unheard-of things against the Elohim of gods."

And back to Messiah's teaching about him, Messiah also makes it clear that the false Messiahs and false prophets of those days **"will appear and perform great signs (Gr. *semeia*) and miracles (Gr. *terata*)"** in order **"to deceive"** (Matthew 24:24). Paul similarly assesses the evils of the days of the lawless one whose coming is **"in accordance with the work of Satan displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles (Gr. *teras*), signs (Gr. *semeion*) and wonders, and in every sort of evil that deceives"** (2 Thessalonians 2:9,10).

Warnings to the Disciples of Messiah and to the Messianic Assembly

The reason Yahusha told his disciples about the coming apostasy, the increase of lawlessness and the appearing of the horrifying desolator was not merely to show he could predict the future. Nor was it only to satisfy the childlike curiosity of his disciples. Yahusha taught all these things so that his followers would be

warned of the very real dangers that lay ahead and so that they would be prepared to take their stand for truth. Since during those final hours there will be a great display of power and signs designed to deceive all people including God's elect, Yahusha wanted his own disciples to be aware of what they would have to face in the future, before he could return. He said, "**See, I have told you ahead of time**" (Matthew 24:25).

It is highly significant that, when asked about the time of his *parousia*, Yahusha's response begins with a stern warning to his disciples. It is the first thing that all believers need to know about his *parousia*. Yahusha would, in short order, describe to them the full glory of his return. But first, he needed to warn them of the deception which would have caused many of them to stumble had they not been warned. The deception was to be a precursor of his glorious *parousia*. Likewise, in any investigation we may undertake to determine the timing of Messiah's return, we need also to carefully hear and consider the loving warnings that Yahusha wants to convey to us.

In the face of the probability that unsuspecting believers would succumb to the deception, Yahusha warned his followers not to be deceived by false prophets and false teachers who would proclaim a false message regarding the nature of his *parousia*. Due to the widespread deception in the last days, Yahusha emphasized the need for the disciples to know the truth about his *parousia*. He repeatedly stressed the grandeur and public display of his appearing as opposed to the false messages which would claim that he will come in secrecy. Yahusha warned, "**Watch out that no one deceives you. For many will come in my name, claiming, 'I am the Messiah,' and will deceive many.**" (24:4,5.). And upon informing them of the coming of wars and rumors of wars, Yahusha exhorted, "**see to it that you are not alarmed**" (v.6). Then, as he described the coming apostasy, he reiterated, "**many false prophets will appear and deceive many people**" (24:11).

Indeed, in our own day, there is a great deal of deceptive false doctrine circulating Christian churches regarding the timing of the return of Messiah at his *parousia*. Yahusha warned his first century disciples and he has warned us. It is up to us to heed this warning. Yahusha said, "**For many will come in my name, claiming, 'I am the Messiah,' and will deceive many.**" (24:5). And this is precisely what we see in our churches today. There are many who come in the name of Yahusha and say that "Yahusha is the Messiah," and then loudly and vociferously proclaim lies about the coming of Messiah and deceive many believers with this message! Some of the best teachers and preachers the Christian community has to offer are the ones who are boldly, passionately and sincerely proclaiming deceptive heresies regarding the coming of Messiah for his church. To be sure, in what may be the greatest irony of contemporary biblical interpretation, the pretribulation rapture message is the deception which Yahusha warned his disciples about.

Yahusha emphatically illustrated the visibility of his coming and he stressed the need for his disciples to beware of the deceptions which would precede his posttribulation *parousia*:

At that time if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Messiah!' or, 'There he is!' do not believe it. For false Messiahs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and miracles to deceive even the elect - it that were possible. See, I have told you ahead of time. So, if anyone tells you, 'There he is, out in the desert,' do not go out; or, 'Here he is, in the inner rooms,' do not believe it. For as lightning that comes from the east is visible even in the west, so will be the coming (*parousia*) of the Son of Man (Matthew 24:23-27).

The implication of Messiah's warnings is this: until Yahusha returns there will be false reports about his coming which

will deceive many people. And the people being deceived are not the unbelievers in the world. The ones deceived are those who believe that "(Yahusha is) the Christ" and are members of His church. That is to say, even God's own people will believe false reports about the coming (*parousia*) of Yahusha unless they are grounded in the teaching of Messiah himself!

Yahusha told us that these deceptions would come. And yet, most of the Protestant Christian churches around the world have believed in the secret, pretribulation rapture theory. Yahusha warned his disciples not to believe the false reports and deceptive teaching of a secret coming of Messiah (rapture)! He warned,

if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Messiah!' or, 'There he is!' do not believe it.... if anyone tells you, 'There he is, out in the desert,' do not go out; or, 'Here he is, in the inner rooms,' do not believe it (Matthew 24:23,26).

The Greek word, *tameion*, translated above as *inner rooms*, can mean,

(1) as a place for storage *storehouse* (LU 12.24); (2) more gener. of the interior rooms of a house reserved for privacy *private room, inner chamber* (MT 6.6) (*Friberg Lexicon*).

n: a room in the interior of a house, normally without windows opening to the outside - 'inner room. 'whatever you whispered in (people's) ears in the inner room will be shouted in public' Lk 12.3. In Lk 12.3 the emphasis is upon the strictly private location of the inner room. In such a context one may translate 'a strictly private room' or 'a small room in the center of the house.' (*Louw-Nida Lexicon*).

Thus, the *tameion* indicates a private or secret place, or a place one goes to have privacy. The false prophets will be proclaiming that the Messiah has (will) come to a secret place for a secret rendezvous with his followers.

So Yahusha is warning his disciples not to believe it if someone comes in his name and proclaims that his *parousia* is to be in a private or secret place. But, isn't this precisely what pretribulationists teach? - that Yahusha will rapture his church secretly and silently to a private meeting place? Indeed, Yahusha has warned us in the Holy Scriptures NOT to believe in the secret rapture taught by false teachers (who come in his name)!!!

But here is the irony: the very message which is proclaimed by most of the evangelical, fundamentalist, bible-believing, Messiah-centered, soul winning, God loving, dynamic churches in the world today, is the same deceptive false doctrine that Messiah warned his disciples NOT to believe. The very same Christians who enthusiastically, sincerely and whole-heartedly teach and preach the pretribulation rapture are themselves deceived and are responsible for spreading the deception, which Yahusha warned us to avoid like the plague!

The pretribulation rapture theory is a modern day example of a false report about Messiah's coming. Yahusha told his followers not to believe any reports about his coming that did not fit his own description of his public, posttribulation *parousia*. And Yahusha taught only a posttribulation coming and gathering of God's people. The pretribulation rapture theory teaches a secret coming of Messiah before his glorious appearing to all the world. But Yahusha warned his disciples repeatedly not to believe any report of a coming of Messiah which was different from that posttribulational appearing which he himself described.

The Christians at Thessalonica were guilty of the same kind of mistake that many contemporary believers are making. Some of them were deceived by the false reports which they thought were from Paul saying that the day of the Lord had come. Paul corrects their understanding of the posttribulation coming of Messiah first by reminding them of the warning which Messiah himself spoke. Paul warned, "**Don't let anyone deceive you in any way!**" (Gr. *mee tis humas exapateesee*, 2 Thessalonians 2:3). This is almost a word for word quote of Messiah who said to his disciples, "**Watch out that no one deceives you**" (Gr. *blepetemee tis humas planeesee*, Matthew 24:4).

Paul also wrote, "**we ask you, brothers, not to become alarmed**" (Gr. *mee throeisthai*, 2 Thessalonians 2:2), as if in imitation of Messiah's words, "**but see to it that you are not alarmed**" (Gr. *mee throeisthe*, Matthew 24:6). Then Paul, after the manner of Messiah, informed his audience that the apostasy and the revelation of the man of lawlessness must come first before Messiah would come for his church.

Modern Christians are making a similar mistake because they are not grounded in the teaching of Yahusha. They believe that a secret rapture is going to take place 7 years prior to the visible posttribulation revelation of Yahusha. And they do so, like the Thessalonians, because they mistakenly think that Paul teaches a secret rapture other than that which Messiah plainly taught.

The Thessalonians thought that Paul had sent them a letter teaching that the day of the Lord was already in progress. And pretribulationists today think that Paul's letters teach a coming of Messiah prior to that coming which Messiah himself spoke of. **But Paul never taught a secret rapture.** Only false prophets and false teachers teach a secret coming of Messiah. Paul unambiguously states that the *parousia* of Messiah and the rapture **must follow** the great apostasy and the revelation of the man of lawlessness, because this is the authoritative teaching of Yahusha as recorded in the Olivet Discourse.

Verbal Parallels Between 2 Thessalonians 2 and Matthew 24

<u>Sayings of Yahusha</u>	<u>Teaching of Paul</u>
"What will be the sign of your <u>coming</u> ...?" Matthew 24:3	"Concerning the <u>coming</u> of our Lord Yahusha Messiah" 2 Thessalonians 2:1
"Watch out that <u>no one deceives you</u> " 24:4	"Let <u>no one deceive you</u> " 2:3
"See to it that you are <u>not alarmed</u> " 24:6	"... <u>not</u> to become... <u>alarmed</u> " 2:2
"Many will <u>turn away from the faith</u> " 24:10	"...until the <u>rebellion</u> occurs" 2:3
"Because of the increase of <u>wickedness (anomia)</u> " 24:12	"the man of <u>lawlessness (anomia)</u> " 2:3
"the abomination of desolation" 24:15	"the man of lawlessness" 2:3
"standing in <u>the holy place</u> " 24:15	"he sets himself up in <u>God's temple</u> " 2:4
"and perform <u>great signs</u> " 24:24	"displayed in all kinds of... <u>signs</u> " 2:9
"and <u>miracles</u> " 24:24	"all kinds of <u>counterfeit miracles</u> " 2:9

"to <u>deceive</u> " 24:24	"that <u>deceives</u> " 2:10
"and will <u>deceive many</u> " 24:5	"a <u>powerful delusion</u> " 2:11
"the <u>Son of Man coming</u> " 24:30	"Concerning the <u>coming of our Lord</u> " 2:1
"and they will <u>gather his elect</u> " 24:31	"and <u>our gathering to him</u> " 2:1

These verbal parallels between Yahusha's teaching to his Jewish disciples about the timing of his coming and Paul's teaching to the "Gentile believers" regarding the return of Messiah for them surely indicates they are from the same source. Indeed, the very words, phrases, figures of speech and themes Messiah used when teaching about his post-tribulation return are used by Paul when he writes of the "rapture." It must be concluded that Paul's "rapture" is the same event as spoken of by Messiah in Matthew 24.

The Authoritative Teachings of Messiah Regarding His Coming

Why should it surprise anyone that the message Messiah spoke regarding his second coming must be the same message which his true disciples taught to the congregation (body) of Messiah. Isn't the Body commanded to follow and obey all the teachings of the Messiah? Of course this is so. That's a no brainer! Yahusha instructed his disciples to go and teach the nations "all that I have commanded."

Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age. (Matthew 28:19-20)

The true and faithful disciples of Messiah MUST put Messiah's teachings ahead of all other man made doctrines and teachings. Messiah only taught about his post tribulation coming to gather his elect. And any correct interpretation of his disciples teachings must be centered in this same message.

The Olivet Discourse, found in the 24th chapter of the gospel of Matthew, is the single most comprehensive and complete of the recorded sayings of Messiah regarding his coming (*parousia*). In it we find Messiah's own answer to his disciples' question, "**What will be the sign of your coming (*parousia*) and of the end of the age?**" (Matthew 24:3).

Because the Olivet Discourse is the written record of the oral teaching of Yahusha Messiah on the topic of his *parousia*, it stands as the **defining work** in the biblical literature regarding the coming of Messiah. As with any topic on which the Lord Yahusha spoke and elaborated upon, we would expect to find that all of the other teachings in the New Testament about the *parousia* of Messiah are based upon and rooted in the teaching of the Master. So when we turn to the Pauline epistles or the letters of Peter or the writings of John, we would expect to find that their teaching regarding the coming of Messiah is in harmony with the sayings and teachings of Yahusha regarding his *parousia*.

This is precisely what we have discovered thus far. We noted above that Paul's famous rapture text, 1

Thessalonians 4:16-21, is in perfect harmony with the Olivet Discourse. We cited numerous verbal affinities and contextual similarities. Among them are the following: the term *parousia* appears in both texts; the concept of a gathering of God's people; a loud trumpet call accentuates both discourses; and even the exhortations those authors give to God's people use the same vocabulary and figures of speech.

When we turn to Peter and even the other writers of the New Testament, we find the same. In fact, all of the New Testament epistles contain evidence that the source of their teaching is from the lips of Yahusha. They all use the same vocabulary, the same figures of speech, and the same exhortations with regard to the rapture of the church as Yahusha used in the Olivet Discourse when he spoke of his posttribulational coming.

In contrast to this, we found no Scriptural support for the secret pretribulation rapture theory. There simply are no biblical underpinnings to support the pretribulation rapture scenario. Our comprehensive studies of the *parousia* of Messiah, of the last days gathering of God's people, and of the day of the Lord point exclusively toward a single posttribulation coming of Messiah and gathering of his elect.

Matthew: For National Israel Only?

It is amazing shortsightedness on the part of dispensationalists and of biblical scholars as a whole that they do not recognize the obvious verbal parallels between the Olivet Discourse and 2 Thessalonians 2. Equally incredible is the rationale used by dispensationalists to nullify the clear implications of the teaching of Matthew for the Messianic assembly. On the one hand, they teach that the book of Matthew is God-inspired and without error. Yet, on the other hand, they circumvent the ramifications of the doctrine found in Matthew for the Body of Messiah by asserting that Matthew's gospel was written for the nation Israel only and that it pertains to the "dispensation" of the kingdom!

By diverting the applicability of Matthew, dispensationalists protect themselves from what teachings they don't care to apply to their church. They take large chunks of this gospel, including the Olivet Discourse, and they reject the relevance of these Scriptures for the church on the basis that they apply to a different dispensation, rather than to our own. They ignore the overwhelming textual evidence we discovered - the verbal parallels between the Lord's own discourse in Matthew 24,25 and Paul's writings in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:10 and 2 Thessalonians 2 - and teach instead that Messiah and Paul are speaking about different "comings" of Yahusha Messiah!!

To respond briefly to these dispensational objections, two pertinent observations need to be made. First, the fact of the "Jewishness" of Matthew is not to be denied. Commentator David Hill has compiled a list of characteristics of Matthew which indicate the Jewish style of that gospel. I quote him here at length:

Although the Gospel contains attacks on Jewish attitudes and practices (e.g. chapter 23), the validity of the Law is emphasized (5.18f.) and the instructions (if not the behaviour) of the scribes and Pharisees are to be followed (23.2f.) and the commandments are to be kept (19.17f.): the disciples are expected to keep the Sabbath, to fast, and to bring their offerings in accordance with Jewish tradition (6.16ff.; 24.20; 5.23f.) and also are obliged to

pay Temple tax (17.24ff.). Jewish usages, ordinances and expressions are employed without explanation; e.g. 'tradition of the elders' (15.2), handwashing scruples, phylacteries (23.5), 'whitewashed tombs' (23.27); cf. also *raca* (5.22) and *korbanas* (27.6)... Matthew puts on Jesus' lips sayings which expressly limit his activity to Israel (10.5,6; 15.24). Jewish speech-formulae ('the Kingdom of heaven', 'your Father in heaven') are often found in Matthew, and the use of *dikaioisune* (righteousness) to describe the conduct required of disciples is found only in this Gospel. The form of the Lord's Prayer in Matthew also suggests Jewish liturgical usage.... (*The New Century Bible Commentary: The Gospel of Matthew*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972, p.39,40)

But secondly, the fact of the "Jewishness" of Matthew does not imply that it is not written "to" or "for" the church. There are many other considerations which suggest that Matthew was not written for "Israel" (the nation) only, but for the believing community, the church at large. "Despite the 'Jewishness' of the book and sayings which limit Yahusha' activity to Israel, there is a strain of universalism which must be taken into account." (*The New Century Bible Commentary: The Gospel of Matthew*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972, p.42)

That the gospel of Matthew is an instruction manual relevant to the life of the church is indicated by many sayings of Yahusha, including: the great commission, the goal of which is to make disciples of the whole world; 'the field is the world' (13:38); 'this gospel...will be preached throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations (24:14); 'the kingdom of God will be...given to a nation producing the fruits of it' (21:43). (*The New Century Bible Commentary: The Gospel of Matthew*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972, pp.42, 43)

Another factor which argues in favor of viewing Matthew as a writing of instructions for the conduct of the Body of Yahusha is the rift between Judaism and the New Testament assemblies:

That the Church Matthew knows was in a real sense separated from, if not actually opposed to, Judaism is indicated by the fact that the author again and again refers to 'their scribes', 'their synagogues' and 'your synagogues', when speaking to Jews: see 7.29; 9.35; 23.34;... Indeed Kilpatrick thinks that these phrases imply a radical separation of church and synagogue. (*The New Century Bible Commentary: The Gospel of Matthew*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972, p.41)

The manner by which Yahusha distinguishes between the unbelieving Jews and his own disciples surely indicates that the sayings of Yahusha are meant to apply to his church which is made up of believing Jews and Gentiles rather than to Israel, the unbelieving nation.

Besides the strain of universalism and the rift between the church and Judaism, a third factor which suggests that Matthew is written "for" the church is the verbal affinities which we have discussed between the sayings of Yahusha and the teaching of the apostles. In view of the numerous direct verbal parallels between the Olivet Discourse and the Thessalonian epistles alone, how can anyone seriously doubt the source of the apostles teaching on the rapture?

The evidence surely indicates that the gospel of Matthew was a summary of the doctrine of the early church, written by a Jewish Christian. Matthew's purpose for his written account of the life and sayings of Yahusha, according to Hill, "is to provide a church with a distinctly Jewish Christian ethos a work from which to teach and preach." (*The New Century Bible Commentary: The Gospel of Matthew*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972, p.43) Matthew

is indeed, as we have demonstrated by pointing out the verbal affinities between the words of Yahusha and the teaching of Paul, "a work from which" the early church did indeed "preach and teach."

The Olivet Discourse: The Apostolic "*Parousia* of Messiah" Tradition

As we have said before, pretribulation dispensationalists argue that the Olivet Discourse was not given to educate the church about the time of trouble through which it would have to pass, but rather, that it describes the trouble "Israel" will endure. Pretribulation rapture advocates reason that Yahusha was speaking to his Jewish disciples who represented the nation of Israel. The great tribulation, the *parousia* of Messiah and the gathering of the elect spoken of by Yahusha, pertain, in their view, only to the nation of Israel. But, they say, the church has a different program and a different hope.

But shouldn't our theology be based on the textual evidence rather than on preconceived notions? The verbal affinities between Yahusha and Paul point most emphatically toward a different conclusion than that which dispensationalists have reached. The disciples of Yahusha do not represent the nation Israel. They represent who they are; namely, the believing remnant of Israel who form the body of Messiah. It is best, then, to take Matthew 24 at face value. The method of interpreting Scripture literally requires us to let the disciples be who they are. And they are the pillars of Messiah's church.

Now Yahusha told his disciples the chain of events which would lead up to his *parousia*. This also is what they in turn taught to their constituencies. In fact, the doctrine of the apostles was the doctrine of the early church. But dispensationalists would have us believe that at some point in time after Messiah's ascension, Paul received new revelation regarding a change in time of the *parousia* of Messiah which pertains to the hope of the church.

If, however, the *parousia* of Messiah for his church is different than the *parousia* which Messiah himself taught the founding disciples of that same church, then Yahusha must have been lying to his disciples, because he told them to expect his coming to be after the great tribulation. Yahusha himself must have intentionally deceived his own disciples about his coming. **For the pretribulation rapture theory to be true, the integrity of Yahusha must be compromised.**

The pretribulation rapture theory is, of course, not true, because Yahusha plainly told his followers exactly when his *parousia* would be in answer to their direct question. And Yahusha told them not to believe anything but a posttribulation *parousia*. Any other teaching or belief falls under the category of false reports intended to deceive. Yahusha did not deceive his disciples. He was telling them the truth about his *parousia*. And the apostles reiterated this truth in their writings of the posttribulation coming of Messiah to gather his people. The verbal affinities between the sayings of Yahusha and the writings of the apostles offer irrefutable and compelling evidence that this is so.

We are left with only one logical explanation for the verbal parallels found in the writings of the New Testament. The Olivet Discourse was the church's handbook on the subject of the *parousia* of Messiah. All of the New Testament letters which address this subject reflect the teaching of Messiah in His Matthew 24

discourse. That sermon was well known to the churches planted by the apostles in the 1st century. And Matthew 24-25 is a written account of the spoken teachings of Messiah which the apostles used to instruct the believing community on the subject of the "end of the age" and the coming of Yahusha.

Summary

When asked point blank when his *parousia* would be, Yahusha explained that the great tribulation would occur first, in which there would be a large scale falling away from the faith and the revelation of Daniel's desolating king. Yahusha warned his disciples not to be alarmed or deceived about false reports regarding his coming.

In 2 Thessalonians 2, Paul says effectively the same thing about Messiah's coming. He notes that the apostasy must take place first and the man of lawlessness must be revealed before Messiah would come in power and glory. The coming of Messiah and our gathering to him will not occur until after these events happen. And Paul cautions his readers not to be alarmed or deceived by any other messengers reporting that Messiah would come in some other fashion..

Paul and the other apostles would have quickly dismissed the theory of a pretribulation rapture because they were well grounded in the teaching of Yahusha. Yahusha warned his own not to believe any report saying that his coming is in secret. His coming will be glorious and visible to all, even as the lightning is seen by everyone.

For these reasons, we conclude that Paul taught only a posttribulation *parousia* of Yahusha and gathering or "rapture" of the church. It is a mistake for God's people to adhere to the pretribulation rapture theory, because it is contrary to the teaching of Yahusha, Paul, Peter, and John. And therefore, it should have no place in the teaching and in the life of those who love the Bible and look forward to the return of our Lord Yahusha Messiah.

END