

affection for you, we were well-pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God but also our own lives, because you had become very dear to us. For you recall, brethren, our labor and hardship, *how* working night and day so as not to be a burden to any of you, we proclaimed to you the gospel of God” (1 Thessalonians 2:8-9). There are two references here witnessed to *to euangelion tou Theou* (τὸ εὐαγγέλιον τοῦ θεοῦ; 1 Thessalonians 2:8) and *to euangelion tou Theou* (τὸ εὐαγγέλιον τοῦ θεοῦ; 1 Thessalonians 2:9), “the gospel of God” (NASU) or “the Good News of God” (TLV). But in 1 Thessalonians 3:2, Paul writes about how “we sent Timothy, our brother and God’s fellow worker in the gospel of Messiah, to strengthen and encourage you as to your faith.” Here, the reference is made to *tō euangeliō tou Christou* (τῷ εὐαγγελίῳ τοῦ Χριστοῦ), “the gospel of Christ” (NASU) or “the Good News of Messiah” (TLV). Surely, in the close identification of the Father and the Son in the saving action of the gospel or the good news, some ancillary indications about the Son’s integration into the Divine Identity, are indeed detected.

## 1 Thessalonians 3:11-13

### “the coming of our Lord Yeshua with all His saints”

**“Now may our God and Father Himself and Yeshua our Lord direct our way to you; and may the Lord cause you to increase and abound in love for one another, and for all people, just as we also *do* for you; so that He may establish your hearts without blame in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Yeshua with all His saints.”**

Paul’s close association of the Father and the Son not just in his writing to the Thessalonians, but also in what the Son is considered to one day perform, is strong proof of the Apostle holding to a high Christology of Yeshua being integrated into the Divine Identity.<sup>7</sup>

In 1 Thessalonians 3:11, Paul reemphasizes his desire to see the Thessalonians in person again (1 Thessalonians 3:6), telling his audience, “Now may our God and Father Himself and *Yeshua* our Lord direct our way to you” (TLV). Theologically, what is significant about 1 Thessalonians 3:11, is how the prayers issued to God involve both the Father and Son invoked together. One might consider a prayer like that seen in Sirach 23:4, “O Lord, Father and God of my life, do not give me haughty eyes,” where God is called both Lord and Father. In 1 Thessalonians 3:11, however, it is the Father who is called God, and the Son who is called Lord. The verb *kateuthunai* (κατεϋθύναι) is an aorist active third person singular, a sure indication that God the Father and Yeshua the Son are acting together. Interpreters have obviously had to note this singular verb, given the fact that it plays some sort of role in understanding the nature of Yeshua. While normally in Second Temple Judaism, God alone would be called Lord and Father, here we definitely see something more involved.

That the Father and Son are invoked together, and that the prayer pattern is based on customary Jewish practice, are clear enough. The opinion of Charles A. Wanamaker on what is seen in 1 Thessalonians 3:11 is, “This, along with 2 Thes. 2:16-17, is the earliest documented evidence of the profound change in prayer language that took place in Christianity as the early Christian community moved away from traditional Jewish prayers, where God alone was addressed or invoked, to the address and invocation of both God and Jesus Christ. Now both God and Jesus Christ are addressed or invoked.”<sup>8</sup> He further states how “The singular verb...reveals that Paul understood them [Father and Son] as having a close relation.”<sup>9</sup>

<sup>7</sup> This entry has been adapted from the author’s commentary *1&2 Thessalonians for the Practical Messianic*.

<sup>8</sup> Charles A. Wanamaker, *New International Greek Testament Commentary: 1&2 Thessalonians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 141.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 142.

## The Nature of Yeshua in the Pauline Epistles and Hebrews

With the Father and Son together being able to grant Paul's prayer request to see the Thessalonians, Morris can only conclude, "Out of his understanding of God there proceeds naturally this form of expression in which we see the highest place given to Jesus. Full deity is ascribed to Him."<sup>10</sup> Looking at the nature of the prayer in 1 Thessalonians 3:11, Robert L. Thomas indicates how "it is futile to argue that the early church only gradually came to look upon Jesus as God...the Father and Son in their unity can grant this request..."<sup>11</sup> Gene L. Green poignantly observes, "To address prayers to the *Lord Jesus* (so 2 Thess. 3.5, 16) in the same breath with God the Father implies a very high Christology. This prayer would be proper only if the apostles held to the divinity of Christ."<sup>12</sup> Witherington echoes this: "Both are viewed as objects of prayer, which is to say that both are viewed as members of the Godhead."<sup>13</sup>

The prayer of 1 Thessalonians 3:11 was that Paul and company would be directed by God—**both the Father and Son**—to return to the Thessalonians without any human or spiritual opposition stopping them.

The sentiment of 1 Thessalonians 3:11 continues, with Paul saying in 1 Thessalonians 3:12, "And may the Lord cause you to increase and overflow with love for one another and for everyone, just as we also do for you" (HCSB). The interconnection of both the Father and Son, as witnessed in v. 11 previously, is so definite—that it is most difficult to determine who "the Lord" is specifically referring to. As Morris notes, "Theoretically 'the Lord' could refer to either of the Persons just mentioned, the Father or the Son, but it is Paul's habit to refer to Jesus by this title."<sup>14</sup> Still the fact that the Divine titles *Theos* (θεός) and *Kurios* (κύριος) appear so close together in 1 Thessalonians 3:11-12, both of which refer to Israel's God in the Greek Septuagint (with *Kurios* used to render the Divine Name YHWH, יהוה)—without a doubt places Yeshua squarely on the Divine side of reality.

Paul's prayer for the Thessalonians' good conduct, was "that He may establish your hearts without blame in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Yeshua with all His saints" (1 Thessalonians 3:13). Living in holiness is a theme of the Torah (Exodus 3:5; Leviticus 11:44), which Paul emphasizes Himself (Romans 6:22; Ephesians 1:1). The later sentiment of the Apostle John, closely parallels that of 1 Thessalonians 3:13: "Now, little children, abide in Him, so that when He appears, we may have confidence and not shrink away from Him in shame at His coming" (1 John 2:28; cf. 3:3).

While there are some details to be evaluated, which are surely debated in terms of the future timing of 1 Thessalonians 3:13—and whether or not "your hearts" involved the possibility of the Messiah returning in the First Century—the evaluation of Believers' holiness and blamelessness will occur after the Second Coming of Yeshua the Messiah to Planet Earth. This is specified by Paul to be "the coming of our Lord Yeshua with all His saints." It is to be rightly recognized that the language here is appropriated from Zechariah 14:5:<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Morris, *First and Second Thessalonians*, 111.

I. Howard Marshall, *New Century Bible Commentary: 1 and 2 Thessalonians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 100, while disagreeing with the directness of Morris, still does conclude, "Paul assumes the divinity of Jesus."

<sup>11</sup> Robert L. Thomas, "1 Thessalonians," in Frank E. Gaebel, ed. et. al., *Expositor's Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978), 11:267.

<sup>12</sup> Gene L. Green, *Pillar New Testament Commentary: The Letters to the Thessalonians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 176.

<sup>13</sup> Ben Witherington III, *1 and 2 Thessalonians: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), pp 102-103.

Cf. Fee, *First and Second Thessalonians*, 130 who references the *Shema* of Deuteronomy 6:4, with the Father and Son identified together.

<sup>14</sup> Morris, *First and Second Thessalonians*, 112.

<sup>15</sup> Erwin Nestle and Kurt Aland, eds., *Novum Testamentum Graece, Nestle-Aland 27th Edition* (New York: American Bible Society, 1993), 535; Kurt Aland, et. al., *The Greek New Testament, Fourth Revised Edition* (Stuttgart: Deutche

1 THESSALONIANS 3:13	ZECHARIAH 14:4-5
<p>May he strengthen your hearts so that you will be blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all his holy ones (TNIV).</p>	<p>In that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, which is in front of Jerusalem on the east; and the Mount of Olives will be split in its middle from east to west by a very large valley, so that half of the mountain will move toward the north and the other half toward the south. You will flee by the valley of My mountains, for the valley of the mountains will reach to Azel; yes, you will flee just as you fled before the earthquake in the days of Uzziah king of Judah. Then the LORD, my God, will come, <i>and</i> all the holy ones with Him!</p>

The claim of Zechariah 14:5 itself is rooted within previous Tanach attestations, such as Deuteronomy 33:2 or Psalm 68:17:

ZECHARIAH 14:5	PREVIOUS TANACH STATEMENTS
<p>You will flee by the valley of My mountains, for the valley of the mountains will reach to Azel; yes, you will flee just as you fled before the earthquake in the days of Uzziah king of Judah. Then the LORD, my God, will come, <i>and</i> all the holy ones with Him!</p>	<p>He said, "The LORD came from Sinai, and dawned on them from Seir; He shone forth from Mount Paran, and He came from the midst of ten thousand holy ones; at His right hand there was flashing lightning for them" (Deuteronomy 33:2).</p> <p>The chariots of God are myriads, thousands upon thousands; the Lord is among them <i>as at</i> Sinai, in holiness (Psalm 68:17).</p>

Christologically, what is most important about 1 Thessalonians 3:13, is that a prophecy action involving the LORD God in the Tanach, arriving to the Earth to issue judgment and to rescue His people—involves Yeshua the Messiah instead. The coming, or *parousia*, of the Lord Yeshua, is actually the arrival of the LORD or Adonai (YHWH). **The direct application of Zechariah 14:5 to Yeshua the Messiah in 1 Thessalonians 3:13, may be regarded as strong evidence** (confirming what has been previously asserted in 1 Thessalonians 3:11) **that Yeshua is indeed God, integrated into the Divine Identity.** A number of important commentators confirm this.

Bruce addresses the actions of 1 Thessalonians 3:13, summarizing, "It is noteworthy...that the Advent of Jesus is described in terms used in the OT on those occasions when the God of Israel reveals himself in glory, attended by his heavenly hosts. The unobtrusive spontaneity with which such language is applied to Jesus by more NT writers than one is more eloquent

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Bibelgesellschaft/United Bible Societies, 1998), 701; Barbara and Kurt Aland, Johannes Karavidopoulos, Carlo M. Martini, Bruce M. Metzger, eds., *Novum Testamentum Graece, 28th Revised Edition* (Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft: Stuttgart, 2012), 626.

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than any formal creedal statement could be.”<sup>16</sup> Certainly while later Christian leaders would come along and formulate different creeds about the Divine nature of the Messiah, albeit doctrinally correct, the claims of the text of an authentic Apostolic letter bear far more authority and significance to us as Bible readers. Witherington asserts how “The language previously applied to the *yom Yahweh* [יהוה יום] and the theophanies of Yahweh in general are now being applied to Jesus.”<sup>17</sup> Fee similarly concludes, “Paul applies directly to Christ language from the Septuagint, where the Lord (*Kurios*) is a substitute for the name of Yahweh. Thus, with the language at the coming of our Lord, Jesus, with all his holy ones, Paul’s intertextual appropriation of Zechariah 14:5 seems certain.”<sup>18</sup>

### 1 Thessalonians 4:14-18

#### “The Return of Yeshua and Resurrection of the Dead”

“For if we believe that Yeshua died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Yeshua. For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Messiah will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words.”

The statements made by the Apostle Paul in 1 Thessalonians 4:14-18, were definitely intended to give the Thessalonians—who were confused about the doctrine of resurrection and the Second Coming—some significant hope for those among them who had died.<sup>19</sup> Many of the Thessalonian Believers, having been reared in Greco-Roman paganism, did not have a firm comprehension on the future realities of the resurrection of the dead. The return of the Lord, and with it the recognition that the departed among them would be restored to biological life, was to bring them great comfort for the future. While 1 Thessalonians 4:14-18 has more to say about the resurrection and future eschatological realities than anything else, Yeshua being the causal agent of the resurrection, and some significant assertions about the nature of Yeshua, are witnessed in this passage.

The first part of 1 Thessalonians 4:14 testifies to the key truth, “For if we believe that Yeshua died and rose again...” (TLV). There are some disagreements, however, about what the second part of 1 Thessalonians 4:14 communicates. The source text says *kai ho Theos tous koimēthentas dia tou Iēsou axei sun autō* (καὶ ὁ θεὸς τοὺς κοιμηθέντας διὰ τοῦ Ἰησοῦ ἄξει σὺν αὐτῷ). There is disagreement about the emphasis of the clause *dia tou Iēsou*, and the verb it is to be associated with.<sup>20</sup> One view makes Yeshua the agent of the Believers’ sleeping (*tous koimēthentas*), and the other makes Yeshua the agent of the Believers’ resurrection (*dia tou Iēsou axei sun autō*).

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<sup>16</sup> Bruce, *1&2 Thessalonians*, 74.

<sup>17</sup> Witherington, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, 104.

<sup>18</sup> Fee, *First and Second Thessalonians*, 134.

Note how there is discussion involving what Paul actually means by saying that Yeshua returns with *tōn hagiōn autou* (τῶν ἁγίων αὐτοῦ). There are three main options available as to who those who will return with Yeshua to Planet Earth are: (1) “saints” meaning Believers, (2) “holy ones” (NIV) meaning God’s angels, or (3) saints/holy ones meaning a mixed assembly of both Believers and God’s angels. This does bear some importance on discussions about the intermediate state between death and the resurrection.

<sup>19</sup> This entry has been adapted from the author’s commentary *1&2 Thessalonians for the Practical Messianic*.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Bruce, *1&2 Thessalonians*, pp 97-98; Wanamaker, pp 169-170; Green, *Thessalonians*, 221; Witherington, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, 133; Fee, *First and Second Thessalonians*, pp 169-173.