

sity as the end of days approaches. Paul gives the same warning:

But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons... (1Tim 4:1)

We should not be surprised, then, when people who have once confessed Yeshua fall away under the pressure of tribulation. Like the seed that sprouted but had no root, so those who deny Yeshua after once confessing Him must be viewed as never having genuine faith in the first place.

Many false prophets will arise and will mislead many. The identity of false prophets is based upon the Torah teaching of Deut 13:1–5 and 18:20–22. The test of a true prophet consists not only in that what he prophesies comes true, but also that his message leads people to confess the one God of Israel, and to walk righteously before Him. The true prophet speaks the words given to him by God, and thus his words are always in concert with God’s revelation to the prophets who preceded him.

The false prophets to which Yeshua refers are therefore those who deny the very message of the prophets of Israel, who spoke of the coming Messiah Who would die as a guilt offering for sinners, and by Whose death and resurrection would redeem them (Is 53). Moreover, the message of the false prophets would be easily accepted, for their message would be palatable to the sinner, offering him or her a way to obtain “salvation” without the need to be humbled before God, seeking His mercy. Further, the false prophets appear to give to those who receive their message a way out of the current struggle and tribulation—a way to protect themselves from suffering for their beliefs. In the end, the message of every false prophets inevitably exalts man and diminishes God, and is therefore a welcomed message to the prideful heart that refuses to acknowledge one’s guilt before God and one’s inability to overcome the debt of sin.

12–14 Because lawlessness is increased, most people’s love will grow cold. But the one who endures to the end, he will be saved. This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all the nations, and then the end will come.

Verses 9–14 form a paragraph that is bound together not only by common theme, but also by grammatical elements. It appears that our verses may mimic the so-called “vav consecutive” construction in biblical Hebrew because vv. 10, 11, 12, and 14 all begin with the word “and” (καί, *kai*).¹ Thus, the verses of this paragraph are clearly linked to form a single unit of thought. Moreover, the focus of this paragraph is the community of those who confess Yeshua, who are hated because of their confession (v. 9), who experience internal strife (betrayal by community members, community members who abandon the community, v. 10), and among whom false prophets or teachers arise (v. 11).

Thus, in vv. 12–13, the lawlessness and lack of love should be understood as likewise occurring specifically within the believing community. While such descriptions may apply to the worldly society at large, it seems clear that Ye-

¹ Some modern English translations, including the NASB, opt to leave out the opening “and” of these verses, seeking to conform to modern English usage which avoids opening a sentence with the word “and.”

shua's words in our text have the believing community primarily in view. At the outset, then, we must reckon with the fact that the visible believing community is comprised of those who have genuine faith, and who therefore "endure to the end," as well as those whose "faith" is spurious and will be shown to be so when trouble increases.

The sequence which our paragraph outlines is important. The rise of persecution (v. 9) causes those without genuine faith to "fall away," that is, deny the faith, and betray their former community members (v. 10). This causes the rise of false prophets who lead even more astray (v. 11). The false teaching likewise produces lawlessness, which in turn causes love to diminish (v. 12).

Because lawlessness is increased... – Literally, "and on account of the increasing of lawlessness..." The verb πληθύνω (*plēthunō*, "to multiply, increase") gives the sense that lawlessness already exists but becomes more dominant. This accords with Dan 12:4 in the Lxx:¹

καὶ σὺ Δανιηλ κάλυψον τὰ προστάγματα καὶ σφράγισαι τὸ βιβλίον ἕως καιροῦ συνελείας ἕως ἂν ἀπομανῶσιν οἱ πολλοὶ καὶ πλησθῆ ἡ γῆ ἀδικίας

And you, Daniel, cover the commandments and seal up the book until the end of time, until many will act irrationally and the land be filled with unrighteousness.

Matthew uses ἀνομία (*anomia*, "lawlessness") three other times in his Gospel. In 7:23, the "lawlessness" characterizes those who claim to have the right to enter the kingdom, based upon their claims to have performed divinely empowered deeds, but who are rejected. In 13:41, those who "do lawlessness" (ποιούντας τὴν ἀνομίαν) are, like the tares sown in the field by the enemy, gathered and burned up with fire in the judgment day. And in 23:28, the hypocrisy of the scribes and Pharisees produce "lawlessness" within even though their outward persona is one of righteousness. In each of these cases, the outward appearance does not match the reality of the heart: workers of miracles, tares that appear as wheat, and the scribes and Pharisees who are like a cup clean on the outside but full of uncleanness on the inside.

The same situation is apparent in our text: "lawlessness" increases because what was hidden and unknown is brought to light in times of tribulation. Community members who have no true faith maintain an outward semblance of righteousness, but when called upon to suffer for their faith, the reality of their hearts is manifest. Further, when they deny the faith they once professed, their lawlessness increases because now estranged from the community of faith, they feel no compunction to hide or mask the lawlessness which characterized their private lives. And this might also yield an even further increase in lawlessness, for unbelievers who hated believers because of their allegiance to Yeshua (v. 9) are strengthened in their hatred by those who abandon the faith and speak against it from a former "inside" position.

...most people's love will grow cold. The Greek τῶν πολλῶν, literally, "the many," is represented by the NASB's translation "most people," and may well give the sense that there will be more than a few who "fall away" and become adversaries to the believing community.

Since the essence of the Torah is loving God and loving one's neighbor, the

1 Θ reads ἡ γνώσις ("the knowledge [will increase]") for ἡ γῆ ἀδικίας ("the land [will be filled] with unrighteousness") which may result from a τ/γ interchange, תערת (MT), "knowledge" for an original תערת "evil."

increase in lawlessness is likewise characterized by a lack of love. Some have questioned whether Matthew intends us to see this lack of love as pertaining to God or to one's fellowman, but neither Matthew, Moses, nor Yeshua would have thought the two could be separated. For a true love of God will always produce a genuine love for others, and lack of love for one's fellowman is evidence that one also lacks true love for God (1Jn 2:9, 11; 3:15; 4:20).

Matthew's use of ψύχω (*psuxō*), "to grow cold, be extinguished," may picture a decline rather than an abrupt curtailment. The word is found only here in the Apostolic Scriptures and in the Lxx, *psuxō* carries the meaning of "spread out" or relates to water being "dried up" or "gathered."¹ If in the koine Greek of Matthew the word still carries some of its Lxx nuance, the meaning might be that love is "spread thin" or "dries up." Josephus uses the verb in the sense of the "cooling of hope," that is, "discouragement."² Thus, in our text, the picture of "love growing cold" could well mean that it wains as trouble increases.

Interestingly, the rabbinic literature also contains a perspective of the end times as characterized by turmoil within the community itself:

With the footprints of the Messiah: presumption increases, and the vine gives its fruit and wine at great cost. The government turns to heresy and there is no reproof and dearth increases... And the wisdom of scribes will putrefy. And those who fear sin will be rejected. And the truth will be locked away. Children will shame elders, and elders will stand up before children. For the son dishonors the father and the daughter rises up against her mother, the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; a man's enemies are the men of his own house (Mic. 7:6). (m.Sota 9.15)

*But the one who endures to the end, he will be saved.*³ – The character of endurance or perseverance is regularly found in eschatological texts and is the essential quality of true faith. For what God has begun, He will, by His sovereign power and grace, finish (Phil 1:6). Thus failure to persevere to the end evidences a lack of God's work. Yet, as is the case in all matters of sanctification, perseverance in the faith involves both the believer's renewed will and the enabling work of the Spirit of God. The believer's perspective is "I am determined to persevere in righteousness," and the Spirit responds with "I will enable you to do that very thing."

And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope.... (Rom 5:3–4, cp. 12:12)

Now may the God who gives perseverance and encouragement grant you to be of the same mind with one another according to Messiah Yeshua.... (Rom 15:5)

Blessed is a man who perseveres under trial; for once he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him. (James 1:12)

Now for this very reason also, applying all diligence, in your faith

1 cf. Num 11:32; 2 Sam 17:19; 2 Kings 19:24; Jer 6:7; 8:2.

2 War 5.472, (καὶ πρὸς τὸ μέλλον ἔψυξε τὴν ἐλπίδα...)

3 This sentence is a verbatim repeat of Matt 10:22, cp. Mk 13:13.

supply moral excellence, and in your moral excellence, knowledge, and in your knowledge, self-control, and in your self-control, perseverance, and in your perseverance, godliness, and in your godliness, brotherly kindness, and in your brotherly kindness, love. (2Pet 1:5–7)

In the book of Revelation, John uses the concept of “victory” to express the goal of perseverance. The Greek verb νικάω (*nikaō*), “to conquer, be victorious,” often translated as “overcome,” is used by John to describe those who remain steadfast in the faith even in the face of great troubles and tribulation. In the letters to the Seven Assemblies (Rev 2–3), the reward of life and salvation is granted to those who overcome.¹ Yet ultimately their ability to persevere is because their Lord, Yeshua, also has gained the victory for them:

These will wage war against the Lamb, and the Lamb will overcome them, because He is Lord of lords and King of kings, and those who are with Him are the called and chosen and faithful. (Rev 17:14)

And thus at the end of John’s Apocalypse, he writes:

He who overcomes will inherit these things, and I will be his God and he will be My son. (Rev 21:7)

We see then, that Yeshua’s words, “the one who endures to the end, he will be saved,” pertain to eternal salvation. For, as already noted, perseverance is the mark of true, saving faith. Enduring to the end may involve giving up one’s life for the name of Yeshua, but for the true believer, death is a victory, not a defeat.

This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all the nations, and then the end will come. – The connection to the previous verse seems to make it clear that those who endure will likewise continue to be witnesses of Yeshua and thus will carry the message of the Gospel of the kingdom to the whole world. This notice looks forward to the missional statement given to the disciples at the end of Matthew’s Gospel (28:18–20) and stands in contrast to the commission given earlier to the disciples that they should not go to the cities of the Gentiles but only to the “lost sheep of Israel” (10:6; 15:24).

The message taken to the nations is “This Gospel of the Kingdom,” that is, the message of the Gospel now specifically centered in Yeshua of Nazaret. While the Gospel has always been centered in the Messiah, His coming “in the fulness of time” (Gal 4:4) had given specific details not only of *when* the Messiah would appear, but also the precise identity of *who* the Messiah would be. The Gospel of the Kingdom therefore could now include historic events which were foretold by the ancient prophets only in general terms. Still, the mission of the Messiah as the “lamb of God,” that is, His death and resurrection on behalf of those who would be saved, remained the core of the Gospel of the Kingdom as it had been from the beginning of time.

Mark’s parallel carries essentially the same message: “The gospel must first be preached to all the nations” (Mk 13:10). The word “preached” is the Greek verb κηρύσσω (*kērussō*) which means “to proclaim” or “to announce” and does envision (as does the word “preach” in our times) a sermonic delivery. The proclamation of the Gospel of the Kingdom is not in word only, but

¹ Rev 2:7, 11, 17, 26; 3:5, 12, 21.

in the life testimony and witness of believers in Yeshua. In fact, as history would show, the manner in which the followers of Yeshua persevered under persecution became one of the strongest means by which they gave witness to the power of their faith.

The proclamation of the Gospel of the kingdom (“word of the kingdom,” 13:19) “in the whole world” (ἐν ὅλῃ τῇ οἰκουμένῃ) has as its background the words of the prophets who envisioned the eschaton as the ingathering of the nations. We see this particularly in Isaiah:

Now it will come about that In the last days the mountain of the house of Adonai will be established as the chief of the mountains, and will be raised above the hills; and all the nations will stream to it. And many peoples will come and say, “Come, let us go up to the mountain of Adonai, to the house of the God of Jacob; that He may teach us concerning His ways and that we may walk in His paths.” For the Torah will go forth from Zion and the word of Adonai from Jerusalem. (Is 2:2–4)

Turn to Me and be saved, all the ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is no other. (Is 45:2)¹

If “the Gospel of Kingdom” answers the question of *what* the message would entail, then “in all the world” (or better, “all the inhabited world”) answers the question of “where.” To fulfill the promise made to Abraham (“in your seed all the nations/families of the earth will be blessed”) it is necessary that the Gospel of the Kingdom be made known to all the nations wherever they may be.

Does this statement likewise offer some indication of *when* the end would come? It would clearly seem so, for Yeshua goes on to say “and then the end will come” (καὶ τότε ἤξει τὸ τέλος). This has given rise to the position that the worldwide proclamation of the Gospel can either hasten or delay the eschaton and the return of Yeshua. Some have suggested this connects with Peter’s words in 2Pet 3:11–12.

Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be destroyed by burning, and the elements will melt with intense heat!

But we must remember that in the ultimate sense, the spread of the Gospel is still in the sovereign hands of God, and He is able to bring the message of Yeshua to even the most remote places in ways we might never imagine. Still, the words of our Lord should embolden us all in the mission of taking the Gospel to all the nations, for He has entrusted to us the message of reconciliation and we must be faithful to take it far and wide.

Thus, though the parousia awaits the completion of the mission, to make disciples among all of the nations, the specific timing of Yeshua’s return cannot be known beforehand. It may well be that Yeshua’s statement regarding the proclamation of the Gospel to the whole inhabited earth functions primarily as further impetus for His disciples to accomplish the missional work that

¹ Note also Is 49:6; 55:5; 56:6–8; Mic 4:1–3.

He has given us.

We see, then, that Yeshua's words in this pericope (vv. 9–14) surely have the end times in view, i.e., the coming of the end. But this does not preclude the idea that in some measure, both the immediate future as well as the eschaton are layered in His words. For the near persecution under Nero in 64 CE could be in view, functioning as portend or template for the tribulation that would come at the end of days. Tacitus gives his account of the manner in which Nero had the followers of Messiah ("Christians") tortured and murdered,¹ a time of severe persecution which undoubtedly gave rise to many falling away from the faith which they once professed. It may be that John's statement in 1Jn 2:19 reflects this very situation:

They went out from us, but they were not really of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us; but they went out, so that it would be shown that they all are not of us. (1Jn 2:19)

Moreover, persecutions of believers in subsequent centuries, and even up to the present day, may all be considered "birth pangs" of the final days.

What are some of the very practical applications that we may derive from this pericope? First, though we must do all in our power to aid and strengthen each member within our respective communities of faith, we should not be dismayed nor utterly discouraged when people deny the faith and abandon their allegiance to Yeshua. And we should not be surprised that such would occur, even though it brings sorrow and unanswered questions. Yeshua has told us in advance.

Second, we must take to heart the value of true community, and commit ourselves to fulfill that part that HaShem has given us to accomplish with the body of Messiah. Individualism has never been God's plan for those who are part of His family, and in the end times, individualism will have even more severe consequences. As the body is in need of all of its members, so the body of Messiah, expressed in each local community (regardless of its size), must strive for a commitment to each other that is strengthened by obedience to the Scriptures which manifests itself in genuine love for each other.

Third, as we consider Yeshua's words, we should be all the more watchful regarding those who teach, for in the last days false prophets will multiply. As already noted, troublesome times offer rich soil for false teachers to plant their errant message of escape. As people become overwhelmed with fear, they are often ready to receive the first voice that offers a way out. This means that we must know the Bible and be able (as did the Bereans) to test what is being taught against the infallible and always-relevant message of the Scriptures.

Now these were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so. (Acts 17:11)

Finally, we must continue to grow strong in our faith as we prepare for what come in the future. In one sense, the primary application of all the prophetic Scriptures is that they admonish us to walk worthy of our calling now and in so doing, to be strengthened for whatever may come in the future.

¹ Tacitus, *Annals*, 15.44.