

2 Thessalonians

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Author As in 1 Thessalonians the letter is from Paul, Silas and Timothy, and the terms “we” and “us” are used throughout. The main writer, though, is Paul and he finishes the letter with a greeting *in my own hand, which is the distinguishing mark in all my letters*. Some have questioned Paul’s authorship because it has a more formal style than his other letters and because its teaching about *the man of lawlessness* is only found in this letter. The early church accepted that Paul was the author.

Written to The church of the Thessalonians. 1:1.

Thessalonica was one of the Roman capitals of Macedonia and was situated on the Egnatian Way – the main route from Italy and Greece to the East. Paul founded a church at Thessalonica on his second missionary journey (Acts 17:1-4). This made the local Jews jealous and they started a riot. They claimed that Paul was guilty of defying Caesar’s decrees because he was teaching about a King called Jesus. That night Paul slipped out of town and made his way to Berea (Acts 17:5-10). The Thessalonian Jews followed him there and again stirred up the crowds against him. (Acts 17:11-13.)



In all, Paul may have only spent a few weeks in Thessalonica.

In later centuries Thessalonica became one of the major strongholds of Christianity.

Date Probably written in Corinth during Paul’s 18 month stay there. It was probably written about 6 months after 1 Thessalonians. This dates the letter around AD 50 or 51.

Type Letter to a church. Paul wrote two letters to the church in Thessalonica. These letters give us important insights into the life of the early Gentile churches.

Theme The main focus of this letter is the second coming of Jesus Christ. This shows how central and important Jesus’ return was for the early Christian believers.

Purposes Paul had heard of some further problems that the Christians in Thessalonica were having and wrote:

- to encourage them to stand firm in their faith
- to correct false teaching that Jesus had already returned
- to explain what must happen before Jesus returns
- to challenge those who had stopped working because they thought Jesus’ coming was imminent.

Key verses

Concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to him, we ask you, brothers, not to become easily unsettled or alarmed by some prophecy, report or letter supposed to have come from us, saying that the day of the Lord has already come. 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, the man doomed to destruction. 2:1-3.

But the Lord is faithful and He will strengthen and protect you from the evil one. 3:3.

Outline

Greeting (1:1,2)

Paul, Silas and Timothy send their greetings to the church of the Thessalonians *in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ* and pray for God's grace and peace to be upon them.

Thanksgiving for the Thessalonians (1:3-12)

Paul thanks God for the Thessalonians' growing faith, increasing love, and endurance under persecution. He could even boast about their *perseverance and faith in all the persecutions and trials* they were experiencing.

God's justice was revealed through this situation. They were suffering and were *counted worthy of the kingdom of God*, while those who have caused their troubles would be punished when *the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with blazing fire*. He will judge those who *do not know God* and those who have not obeyed the gospel. They will be punished with everlasting destruction and will be *shut out from the presence of the Lord* on the day that Jesus returns. The Thessalonians, though, were among those who had believed the gospel. They will see the glory of Jesus' coming and will realize that they have not believed or suffered in vain.

Paul prays for them constantly, praying that God may count them worthy of His calling and He will fulfill every good purpose of theirs and every act of faith. He prays this so that the *name of the Lord Jesus will be glorified in you, and you in Him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ*.

Some wonder how God can be a God of love and at the same time judge people and punish them for their sins. These verses show that God has made His salvation available to all, so when people reject God's love they are choosing their own eternal destiny. It's not that God is unjust or vengeful; rather, He wants everyone to be saved. If people reject God's salvation they must face the consequences.

Events that must take place before Jesus returns. (2:1-12)

Paul now deals with his main message *concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to Him*. Some false teachers had apparently said that *the day of the Lord has already come*. Paul strongly asserts that this is not true because before the day of the Lord a number of events must take place:

- There will be a time of *great rebellion*.
- *The man of lawlessness* (or the Antichrist 1 John 2:18; 4:3) will be revealed, but he is doomed to destruction. He will *oppose and exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshipped* and will *set himself up in God's temple*. He will even proclaim himself to be God.
- The Holy Spirit was holding the man of lawlessness back *but the secret power of lawlessness was already at work*. The Holy Spirit will continue to do this until He is taken *out of the way*.
- When the lawless one is revealed all hell will break loose. It will be *in accordance with how satan works* with all sorts of *displays of power* and *deceptive signs and wonders*. Many will be deceived and will perish because they *refuse to love the truth and so be saved*. God will send a powerful delusion on them because they have believed satan's lies. All who have not believed the truth and who have delighted in wickedness will be condemned.
- The lawless one will finally be overthrown and destroyed when Jesus returns.



Encouragement to stand firm. (2:13-3:5)

Paul thanks God that the Thessalonians were *brothers and sisters loved by the Lord* and that *from the beginning* God had chosen them to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth. He did this through the gospel so that they might *share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ*.

He asks that *the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, and God our Father* who loved them and had already given them encouragement and hope to now encourage their hearts and strengthen them *in every good deed and word*.

Knowing that they have been truly saved they are to:

- *Stand firm*
- *Hold to the teachings* that Paul had passed on to them by *word of mouth* and by *letter*
- Pray for Paul and his co-workers so that the message of the Lord *may spread rapidly and be honoured*, as had happened with the Thessalonians. Also pray that they may be *delivered from wicked and evil people for not everyone has faith*.

The *Lord is faithful* and will *strengthen and protect* them *from the evil one*. Paul has confidence that they are doing and will do the things he commands so he asks that the Lord will direct their hearts into God's love and Christ's perseverance.

These verses show how our Christian lives are a balance between what we must do and what God does:

What we do	What God does
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Believe in the truth • Stand firm as Christians • Hold fast to the truth of the gospel • Be obedient to the Lord and His word • Share the gospel with others • Persevere 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Love us • Choose us to be saved • Call us • Sanctify (set us apart for Himself) by the Holy Spirit) • Encourage us • Strengthen and protect us • Share in the glory of the Lord Jesus

Eschatology in 1 and 2 Thessalonians

Eschatology is focused on trying to understand what will happen when Jesus returns. It is often based around Jesus' teaching in Matthew 24 and 25, and John's vision in the Book of Revelation, but Paul's teachings in 1 and 2 Thessalonians add a lot to these other passages.

Here is what we learn about the Second Coming in 1 and 2 Thessalonians:

Events before Jesus returns

- People will be saying *peace and safety*. 1 Thessalonians 5:3.
- There will be widespread rebellion and lawlessness which is restricted somewhat by the power of the Holy Spirit. 2 Thessalonians 2:3,7.
- The man of lawlessness will be revealed. He will:
 - exalt himself over anything Christian.
 - be worshipped.
 - set himself up in God's temple.
 - proclaim himself to be God.
 - do counterfeit signs and wonders
- There will be widespread evil, deception and delusion.
- People will refuse to believe the truth and be saved. 2 Thessalonians 2:1-3,9.
- People will delight in wickedness. 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12.

Events when Jesus returns

- It will happen suddenly, when people are not expecting it, but Christians are (hopefully) ready for it. 1 Thessalonians 5:1-6.
- Christians who have already died will come with Jesus as He returns. 1 Thessalonians 4:14.
- Jesus will come down from heaven with a loud command, the voice of the archangel and a trumpet call. 1 Thessalonians 4:16.
- Jesus will destroy the lawless one. 2 Thessalonians 2:8.
- The dead in Christ will rise first. 1 Thessalonians 4:16.
- Those who alive in Christ will be caught up with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. 1 Thessalonians 4:17.
- Christians will be with the Lord forever. 1 Thessalonians 4:17.

Warning against idleness (3:6-15)

The other main purpose for writing this letter is to warn against idleness and laziness. It is likely that believers thought they didn't need to work because they were convinced that Jesus would be returning very soon. The Thessalonians are to *keep away from every believer who is idle and disruptive*. Paul had taught them to work hard and had practiced it his own life. He was *not idle* when he was with them; did *not eat anyone's food without paying for it*, and *worked night and day, labouring and toiling* so he would not be a burden to them. He may have had a right to *such help*, but chose to be a model for them to follow. His rule was *anyone who is unwilling to work shall not eat*. Christians are to *settle down and earn the bread they eat*, and to *never tire of doing what is right*. Anyone who rejects this teaching should not be associated with, but not be *regarded as an enemy*. Rather they should be *warned as fellow believers*.

Final greetings (3:16-18)

Paul concludes the letter with prayers for peace and grace, written in his *own hand*. (By saying this it probably meant that up to that point Paul had used someone else to write down his thoughts. He did this regularly in his letter writing. See 1 Corinthians 16:21; Colossians 4:18, Romans 16:22).

Discussion questions

Why did Paul write 2 Thessalonians?

How was the situation of the church in Thessalonica similar to and different from the situation facing the church today? How is the message of 2 Thessalonians relevant for the church today?

What happens when Christians die? What happens when Jesus returns? How does the teaching on these matters in 2 Thessalonians fit in with teaching on the Second Coming in other parts of the Bible?

The Thessalonian Christians obviously expected Jesus to return at any moment. How did this expectation affect their behaviours? How have believers over the centuries reacted when Jesus has not returned? Have we lost a sense of the imminence of Jesus' return? What effects does this have on the church of today?

Paul strongly tells the Thessalonians that idleness and laziness is not an option as part of their Christian lives. Is idleness and laziness a factor in many Christians' lives? What does Paul say should motivate Christians to work hard? Do you work hard? What motivates you to work hard?

Paul worked to earn his own way, paid for his food, and made no demands on the resources of the Churches he was serving. What does this say to Pastors and "full-time Christian workers" who make their living from those they are serving?

What have you learned from your study of 2 Thessalonians? How will you apply this in the future?