
The Book of II Thessalonians

Both letters to the church at Thessalonica were written because Paul could not go to them personally. He would rather teach them face to face, but there were three main reasons why he could not:

1. Distance – many months away.
2. The Jews constantly caused Paul all kinds of trouble. He was earlier forced to make a hasty exit from Thessalonica.
3. Because of the hindrance of Satan, the arch opponent of the Word of God (I Thess. 2:18).

II Thessalonians is the “Book of the Day of the Lord.” It would appear that this letter followed Paul’s first letter to the believers at Thessalonica by only a few months. Much of what Paul writes in this letter is to reinforce what was written in the first letter or what he taught them when he was with them (2:5). Both letters are filled with eschatological teaching.

I. Author

The Apostle Paul declares himself to be the writer in II Thessalonians 1:1 (2:5; 3:17). Prior to his salvation, his goal was to destroy the church (Acts 8:3). God used him to establish the church of Jesus Christ from one end of the Mediterranean to the other. The early church fathers recognized Paul as the author. There were no questions raised regarding Paul’s authorship until the 19th century and these came from rationalistic critics who refused to accept the Bible’s claim to divine inspiration and inerrancy. Their primary objections related to the fact that the letter was written so closely to the first epistle and that there are so many similarities.

II. Date

Acts 17 records the founding of the church in Thessalonica. The Epistle was written from Corinth (Acts 18). Acts 18:12 records that Gallio was the deputy of Achaia at the time. An inscription was located in Delphi, Greece that refers to Gallio’s office dated at AD 51 and 52. This is a fixed date for one of the earliest of Paul’s epistles. It would appear that the letter carrier of the first epistle to these believers returned speedily to Corinth and gave Paul a detailed account of the state of the Thessalonian church.

III. Purpose of the Letter

1. To **Clarify** – Paul wrote to clarify misunderstandings from his earlier teaching with them and from his first epistle. Paul had taught them that the “Day of the Lord” would come as a thief in the night. Some of them, due to persecution, felt that they were already in that period. There existed some hysteria in the church due to the false belief that the Lord’s Second Coming was so close that they should stop everything else to prepare for it to take place. Paul wrote that they should not be so easily unsettled or alarmed (2:2). He wanted them to understand that other events would take place prior to the Lord’s return:
 - A. Apostasy (2:3) – a revolt away from truth and righteousness.
 - B. Appearance (2:3) by the man of sin who will claim divinity and take his seat in the temple, displaying signs and wonders (2:4).
2. To **Correct** – Someone forged a letter, using Paul’s name to declare that the “Day of the Lord” had come. Paul wrote to make sure that they knew this letter was not from him and to correct the false teaching they had received. He wrote to assure them that the time of Tribulation had not yet come (1:1-2:12).
3. To **Comfort** – Paul recognized that many of the believers were experiencing persecution, some severe. He further recognized their need of encouragement in the midst of their persecution. They were encouraged by the knowledge that Paul was praying for them and by being informed as to what would happen to their persecutors (1:8, 9, 11).
4. To **Condemn** the poor conduct of some who were quitting their jobs and becoming lazy thinking that the return of Christ was very soon. They needed some instruction in the area of church discipline (3:6-15).
5. To **Commend** them for their growing faith and love in the midst of persecution (1:3).

IV. Keys to Understanding II Thessalonians

1. There are 3 chapters, 47 verses and 1,042 words in the King James translation.
2. Judgment would be the key word.
3. Key Chapter: Chapter 2
4. Key Verse: II Thessalonians 2:3 – ***“Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first.”***
5. Key Event: Apostasy – The lie = Universal Delusion
6. Key Character: The Antichrist
7. Three chapters and three key words:
 - A. Chapter 1 – Wait
 - B. Chapter 2 – Watch
 - C. Chapter 3 – Work

V. Outline

- I. Comfort in Persecution (1:1-12)
 - A. Persecution produces growth (1:3-5)
 - B. Persecution prepares us for glory (1:6-10)
 - C. Persecution endured glorifies Christ (1:11-12).
- II. Correction Concerning the Day of the Lord (2:1-17)
 - A. Apostasy (2:1-3)
 - B. Rebuilding of the Temple (2:4-5)
 - C. Restrainer Removed (2:6-12)
 - D. Challenge to Believers (2:13-17)
- III. Conduct in View of the Day of the Lord
 - A. Prayer and Patience (3:1-5)
 - B. Separation and Service (3:6-13)
 - C. Obedience (3:14-15)

VI. The City of Thessalonica

It was founded in 315 BC by Cassander, King of Macedon. When Rome made Macedonia a province in 146 BC, Thessalonica was made its political and commercial capital. It became the second largest city in Macedonia (Philippi being the first). It served as a seaport for the agricultural plains of the region. It was located on Rome's greatest highway making it a great commercial center with the Orient. When Paul arrived in the city, it had a population of more than 200,000, which was very large for that time. The Jewish population of the city was both large and influential. Thus, it was certain that Paul would face tremendous opposition there. The city still stands but has changed its name to Salonika.

VII. The Church

Paul visited Thessalonica on his second missionary journey with Silas and Timothy (Acts 17:1-9). His condition going into the city must have been pathetic as he had come from Philippi where he was “shamefully entreated” (I Thessalonians 2:2). The trip alone was about four days journey (100 miles). His back was probably still lacerated when he entered the city and yet in just four short weeks he organized a marvelous church.

1. He first preached in the synagogues of the Jews (Acts 17:1-2).
2. He preached the Scriptures (Acts 17:2).
3. He preached the basic truths: That Christ had to suffer, die and rise from the dead (Acts 17:3).
4. The results were devastating and immediately these converts began to turn their world upside down for Jesus Christ (Acts 17:4-5). A church was formed out of a few Jews and a large number of Greek proselytes to Judaism.

5. The strict Jews were enraged by this activity and they engineered a mob to hinder the ministry. The opposition became so great that the new Christians smuggled the three missionaries out of the city under cover of night.
6. After a short stay in Berea, Paul left for Athens but he couldn't forget the work started in Thessalonica. He sent Timothy back to minister to them and to bring a report of their welfare.
7. In the meantime, Paul moved to Corinth and Timothy later joined him there bringing with him an encouraging report of how the church was thriving despite persecution (I Thess. 3:1-3).

VIII. Other Features

1. Every age has its own style of letter writing. We write using a three point style:
 - A. Address – "Dear Mom."
 - B. Body of the letter
 - C. Statement and signature of sender – "Love, Bob," or "Sincerely, Carl."

The average letter in the ancient world followed six basic parts. The New Testament Epistles did not always follow this format.

- A. The name of the writer
- B. The name of the recipient
- C. Greeting
- D. Prayer wish and thanksgiving
- E. Body of the letter
- F. Final greeting and farewell.

In II Thessalonians, Paul departs from this format.

- A. The name of the writer (the senders) – Paul and Company (1:1).
- B. Receivers: "To the church at Thessalonica."
- C. Greeting: Grace and peace.
- D. Body of the Letter (1:3 – 3:15).
- E. Conclusion (3:16-18).

Paul's unique feature is that he always starts his letters and ends them with the same greeting – GRACE. We live in the age of grace and Paul both supports and emphasizes that truth. God's grace is His favor extended toward us on the basis of Christ's work on Calvary's cross.

2. Eschatology is the theological emphasis of II Thessalonians. Many feel that theology is something that is beyond their understanding and therefore they ignore it. However, the theological truths presented in the epistles were always applied to specific circumstances and needs. From that perspective, theology is personal, relevant and practical and should be studied by every believer.
3. II Thessalonians provides the most detailed description of the Antichrist (counterfeit-Christ) in the Bible. It is difficult to imagine that any believer could be neutral about the truths in chapter two relating to this individual. It really should be enough to cause unbelievers to be afraid. ***Who opposeth ad exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God*** (II Thessalonians 2:4).

Final Thought: It is God's will that we live one day at a time, concentrating on today. Tomorrow will take care of itself. ***Take therefore no thought for the morrow for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof*** (Matthew 6:34).