

II THESSALONIANS

Outlined Bible

Introduction: A period of no more than several months separates the writing of I and II Thessalonians. The first letter dealt with some misunderstanding about the second coming of Jesus Christ. For example, some had feared that those who had already died would be unable to participate in that glorious event (I Thessalonians 4:13-18). Others were speculating on a time or date for Jesus' coming. (5:1-4) Despite the fact that Paul addressed these concerns in his first letter to Thessalonica, the problems and misperceptions had grown worse. (2:1ff) Because of the deaf ear, the Thessalonians had turned to Paul's first letter, his second letter takes on a much harsher and firmer tone.

Name — The letter is named for the people who initially received it.

Author — Paul (II Thessalonians 1:1: 3:17)

Purpose — II Thessalonians was written for two key reasons:

1. To correct errors about the "day of the Lord."
2. To talk about the discipline of problem believers.

I. Background of the book.

- A. The first Thessalonian letter had been written and sent from Corinth in AD 51.
- B. The second Thessalonian letter was written within a few weeks or months of the first.
 1. Paul had received an updated oral report of the situation there. (II Thessalonians 3:11)
 2. Apparently a forged letter had been circulating among the Christians there. (II Thessalonians 2:2-3)
 3. Therefore Paul felt an obligation to respond to these problems immediately.
- C. The date of II Thessalonians is likely late AD 51.

II. The main message of the book.

- A. Like the first letter to the Thessalonians, this letter is primarily concerned with the second coming of Jesus.
- B. Paul strongly exhorts the Thessalonians to stand firm in the teaching they had already received and not to be persuaded by false teaching and silly speculation.
- C. "On the day he comes to be glorified in his holy people and to be marveled at among all those who have believed. This includes you, because you believed our testimony to you." (1:10)

III. Outline of the book.

- A. Personal remarks. (II Thessalonians 1:1-12)
 1. Salutation. (1:1-2)
 2. Paul offers a prayer of thankfulness for the Thessalonians. (1:3-12)
- B. Additional teaching about the second coming of Jesus. (2:1 — 3:18)
 1. Paul disclaims having taught that the *parousia* is imminent. (2:1-2)
 2. In fact, the Lord will not come back until the "man of lawlessness" has been revealed. (2:3-12)
 3. He appeals for a steadfast faith and prayers on his behalf. (2:13—3:5)
 4. He commends discipline toward those who teach falsely about the second coming. (3:6-15)
 5. The letter closes with:
 - a. A prayer. (3:16)
 - b. A benediction. (3:17-18)

IV. Key themes of the book.

- A. Who is the "man of lawlessness" in II Thessalonians 2:1-12?

1. Characteristics:
 - a. The man of lawlessness will be revealed before the Day of the Lord. (v. 3)
 - b. He will lead a rebellion. (v. 3)
 - c. He will "oppose and exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshipped." (v. 4)
 - d. He will set himself in "God's temple" proclaiming himself to be God. (v. 4)
 - e. His coming will be accompanied by all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs, and wonders, (v. 9)
 - f. He will bring with him every sort of evil to deceive those who are perishing. (v. 10)

2. What are the possibilities of his identity?

- a. Premillennialists equate the "man of lawlessness" with the Antichrist (ff. I John 2:18) — supposedly a final personification of evil who would appear just prior to the 2nd coming of Jesus Christ and his establishment of a 1000-year reign.
- b. Many Protestants identify the man of lawlessness with the papacy of Catholicism.
- c. Others identify the man of lawlessness with a Roman emperor or emperors who persecuted the early church (e.g. - Nero or Domitian).
- d. Another possibility dismisses the identification with any particular person but associates the man of lawless with a spirit of rebellion and disobedience.

3. Who is/was he?

- a. Because of the unfounded speculations that are the foundation of premillennialism, this possibility is implausible.
- b. While the pope claims to be the "vicar of Christ", he does not claim to be God.
- c. The identification of the man of lawlessness as a Roman emperor (or line of emperors) is quite possible.

[1] v. 4 — Roman emperors (e.g. - Domitian) blasphemed deity and demanded to be worshipped as gods.

[2] v. 6-7 — That which may have been "holding back" the man of lawlessness could be the last vestiges of Roman democracy.

[3] v. 8 — Jesus will destroy him at His coming.

[4] v. 9-10 — There will be many counterfeit signs and miracles associated with the man of lawlessness. This could be a reference to mock priesthood which Domitian set up to worship him.

[5] Finally, Paul's veiled references to this person would be an understandable attempt to avoid government suppression and persecution from the Roman governor.

- d. The idea that the man of lawlessness represents the continuing struggle between Christianity and Satan is the next most likely interpretation.

[1] I John 2:18 states that as time passes, many Antichrists will appear.

[2] The point made with this interpretation would be that every time evil becomes a real threat to the continuing existence of Christianity, the Lord will come and remove the threat.

[3] The problem with this interpretation is that the text seems to refer to a specific person or persons.

- e. Frankly, it must be admitted that no one can identify the man of lawlessness with dogmatic specificity.

- B. What about "signs" of the second coming?

1. In every generation sensationalists point to earthquakes, wars, volcanoes and other calamities to be signs declaring that the coming of the Lord is near.
2. Many of these individuals point to the signs of Matthew 24:5-31 as indicators of his *parousia*.
 - a. These were signs that foretold the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70. (Matthew 24:1-3)
 - b. Jesus specifically stated that all these would be fulfilled in his own generation. (Matthew 24:34)
3. By contrast, Jesus declares that there would be no sign given to usher in His second coming. (Matthew 24:36-44)
4. Some early Christians expected the appearance of Jesus at any moment.

- a. Some had even stopped working and spent all their time waiting. (II Thessalonians 3:6-10)
 - b. Paul instructed the Thessalonians that the man of lawlessness would come first. (II Thessalonians 2:3)
 - c. Given the options for his identity described earlier, that condition has apparently been met.
5. Therefore, we stand ready for Christ's return, not hinging our faith upon subjective interpretation of alleged signs.
- C. Thessalonian problem with idleness. (3:6-13)
- 1. Some of the Christians at Thessalonica had decided that since Jesus was coming immediately, there was no need to work.
 - a. These folks became "moochers" (v. 6-8) and busy-bodies. (v.11)
 - b. Paul said that their behavior was contrary to the example he had set while among them. (v. 7-9)
 - 2. Paul lays down the principle in verse 10 "Night and day we pray most earnestly that we may see you again and supply what is lacking in your faith."
 - 3. This command speaks volumes to our modern entitlement mentality.

2 THESSALONIANS

"Paul tells the Thessalonians that he boasts about their perseverance in all the persecutions. All this is evidence that God's judgment is right, and as a result you will be counted worthy of the kingdom of God. He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you and give relief to you who are troubled, and to us as well." (2 Thess.1:4)

Concern about the Second Coming

"This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels (The end of the ages, the 2nd Coming). He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power on the day he comes to be glorified in his holy people and to be marveled at among all those who have believed. This includes you, because you believed our testimony to you." (2 Thess.1:5-10)

"Concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to him, do not 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 for that day will not come until the rebellion (a falling away, defection, apostasy (Thayer's Greek Lexicon)) occurs and the man of lawlessness (man of utter destruction - Thayer) is revealed, the man doomed to destruction. He will oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshiped, so that he sets himself up in God's temple, proclaiming himself to be God." (2 Thess.2:1-4)

Comment: A falling away or apostatizing can occur only by those who are in some group. In this case it is a falling away of those in Christ.

"Don't you remember that when I was with you, I used to tell you these things? And now you know what is holding him back, so that he may be revealed at the proper time. For the secret power of lawlessness is already at work; but the one who now holds it back will continue to do so till he is taken out of the way. And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will overthrow with the breath of his mouth

and destroy by the splendor of his coming. The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with the work of Satan displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders, and in every sort of evil that deceives those who are perishing. They perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. For this reason, God sends them a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie and so that all will be condemned who have not believed the truth but have delighted in wickedness.” (2 Thess.2:5-12)

Comment: Those who hear the truth have a choice to accept or reject. Christians everywhere need to see that His message is proclaimed.

“But we ought always to thank God for you, brothers loved by the Lord, because from the beginning God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth. He called you to this through our gospel, that you might share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the teachings we passed on to you, whether by word of mouth or by letter.” (2 Thess.2:13-15)

“Finally, brothers, pray for us that the message of the Lord may spread rapidly and be honored, just as it was with you. And pray that we may be delivered from wicked and evil men, for not everyone has faith. But the Lord is faithful, and he will strengthen and protect you from the evil one.” (2 Thess.3:1-3)

“Keep away from every brother who is idle and does not live according to the teaching you received from us. Do not be a burden to any of you. We gave you this rule: "If a man will not work, he shall not eat." We hear that some among you are idle. Some among you are idle, are not busy; but busybodies. Urge them to settle down and earn what they eat.” (2 Thess.3:6-13)

Comment: Capable Christians need to provide for themselves, their family and those in need rather than those who can but will not.

“If anyone does not obey our instruction in this letter, take special note of him. Do not associate with him, in order that he may feel ashamed. Yet do not regard him as an enemy, but warn him as a brother.” (2 Thess.3:13-14)

Key point from 2 Thessalonians

- Do not be misled by the teachings of some reported Christians that appear to be true but are contrary to the teachings of Christ or His apostles. One must know Christ and His teachings to not be led astray.

Question - What happens to Christians after they die?