

Second Thessalonians

Scripture: 2 Thessalonians

Code: MSB53

Title

In the Greek NT, 2 Thessalonians is listed as “To the Thessalonians.” This represents the Apostle Paul’s second canonical correspondence to the fellowship of believers in the city of Thessalonica (cf. 1:1).

Author and Date

Paul, as in 1 Thessalonians, identified himself twice as the author of this letter (1:1; 3:17). Silvanus (Silas) and Timothy, Paul’s co-laborers in founding the church, were present with him when he wrote. Evidence, both within this letter and with regard to vocabulary, style, and doctrinal content, strongly supports Paul as the only possible author. The time of this writing was surely a few months after the first epistle, while Paul was still in Corinth with Silas and Timothy (1:1; Acts 18:5) in late A.D. 51 or early A.D. 52 (see Introduction to 1 Thessalonians: Author and Date).

Background and Setting

For the history of Thessalonica, see Introduction to 1 Thessalonians: Background and Setting. Some have suggested that Paul penned this letter from Ephesus (Acts 18:18–21), but his 18 month stay in Corinth provided ample time both for the Thessalonian epistles to be authored (Acts 18:11).

Apparently, Paul had stayed apprised of the happenings in Thessalonica through correspondence and/or couriers. Perhaps the bearer of the first letter brought Paul back an update on the condition of the church, which had matured and expanded (1:3); but pressure and persecution had also increased. The seeds of false doctrine concerning the Lord had been sown, and the people were behaving disorderly. So Paul wrote to his beloved flock who were: 1) discouraged by persecution and needed incentive to persevere; 2) deceived by false teachers who confused them about the Lord’s return; and 3) disobedient to divine commands, particularly by refusing to work. Paul wrote to address those 3 issues by offering: 1) comfort for the persecuted believers (1:3–12); 2) correction for the falsely taught and frightened believers (2:1–15); and 3) confrontation for the disobedient and undisciplined believers (3:6–15).

Historical and Theological Themes

Although chaps. 1,2 contain much prophetic material because the main issue was a serious misunderstanding generated by false teachers about the coming Day of the Lord (Paul reveals that the Day had not come and would not until certain other events occur), it is still best to call this “a pastoral letter.” The emphasis is on how to maintain a healthy church with an effective testimony in proper response to sound eschatology and obedience to the truth.

Eschatology dominates the theological issues. One of the clearest statements on personal eschatology for unbelievers is found in 1:9. Church discipline is the major focus of 3:6–15, which needs to be considered along with Matt. 18:15–20; 1 Cor. 5:1–13; Gal. 6:1–5, and 1 Tim. 5:19,20 for understanding the complete Biblical teaching on this theme.

Interpretive Challenges

Eternal reward and retribution are discussed in 1:5–12 in such general terms that it is difficult to precisely identify some of the details with regard to exact timing. Matters concerning the Day of the Lord (2:2), the restrainer (2:6,7), and the lawless one (2:3,4,8–10) provide challenging prophetic material to interpret.

Outline

I. Paul’s Greeting (1:1, 2)

II. Paul’s Comfort for Affliction (1:3–12)

A. By Way of Encouragement (1:3, 4)

B. By Way of Exhortation (1:5–12)

III. Paul’s Correction for Prophetic Error (2:1–17)

A. Prophetic Crisis (2:1, 2)

B. Apostolic Correction (2:3–12)

C. Pastoral Comfort (2:13–17)

IV. Paul’s Concern for the Church

A. Regarding Prayer (3:1–5)

B. Regarding Undisciplined Living (3:6–15)

V. Paul's Benediction (3:16–18)

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