

2 Thessalonians: Christian Living in Light of Christ's Return

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The Historical Background: Acts 17:1-10

Paul and Silas arrived in Thessalonica after being released from the Philippian prison (Acts 16:39-40). They began to minister in the city and in the Jewish synagogue there (17:1). During their time in the city, Paul took up tentmaking (1 Thess 2:9; 2 Thess 3:8), they preached the gospel and had a warm reception from pagan Gentiles (1 Thess 1:9), and they were able to address the Jewish synagogue directly at least three times (Acts 17:2-3).

Upon their powerful preaching that Jesus was the Messiah and the conversion of Jews, Gentile proselytes, and leading women, the Jewish religious leadership stirred up a riot and forced Paul to leave (Acts 17:4-5).

They dragged a believer named Jason to the authorities, charging that the Thessalonian Christians had welcomed these men who had "turned the world upside down." For the safety of the Thessalonian church, Paul and Silas were sent away by night westward to Berea (Acts 17:10), where they were later joined by Timothy (Acts 17:14).



The First Letter to the Thessalonians: Reassuring and Encouraging

Forced by the Jews again to leave Berea (Acts 17:14), Paul went to Athens to wait for Silas and Timothy (Acts 17:15). As Paul waited in Athens, his heart longed for the believers in Thessalonica, whose young faith was being tested by the white-hot fires of persecution. Apparently, the news from Silas and Timothy was not entirely encouraging, so Paul and Silas sent Timothy back to Thessalonica (1 Thess 3:1-3). When Timothy returned and met up with Paul in Corinth (Acts 18:1, 5), Paul finally heard good news. Rejoicing over the Thessalonian church's perseverance, he wrote his first epistle to that church. In this letter, he rejoices at how God has saved them and is at work in them. He also reminds them that God has saved them to live a holy life as they await the coming of Jesus Christ.

- We are saved to serve God and wait for the Lord's return (1:1-10).

He remembers their work produced by their faith, their labor prompted by love, and their steadfastness inspired by hope, all evidences of their election (1:2-4). He knows that God has chosen them because of their reception of the gospel and their testimony (1:5-10).

- Paul's life and ministry were consistent with the gospel he proclaimed (2:1-3:13).

Paul's actions in Thessalonica and afterward had been brought into question by opponents in an effort to discredit Paul's ministry and to gain a following. In these two chapters, Paul defends his ministry and life by pointing out that his actions were wholly consistent with the gospel he preached and that the readers themselves were eyewitnesses of his ministry.

- How we ought to live in light of the Lord's return (4:1-5:22).

God has called believers to moral purity (4:1-8). God has taught believers to love each other (4:9-12). God comforts believers regarding brothers who have died (4:13-18). God has destined believers for ultimate salvation, not judgment (5:1-11).

- A prayer to God that we would obey the directives in this letter (5:23–28).

“Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it.”

The Second Letter to the Thessalonians: Follow-up and Encouragement

After the first letter was delivered and read to the church (1 Thess 5:27), news came back to Paul about some confusion regarding the Day of the Lord among the believers (2 Thess 2:1–3). There was also a problem of some believers who had taken Paul’s command to “wait for Jesus to return” quite literally: they had stopped working and had taken up full-time meddling in the lives of others (2 Thess 3:11). Again, Paul lays out the coming of Jesus Christ and encourages the believers to stand firm in the face of opposition and persecution (2 Thess 2:15). Paul reiterates his command for believers to work (2 Thess 3:12; cf. 1 Thess 4:11–12) and commands the church not to support this kind of disorderly Christian living (2 Thess 3:14–15).

- Persecutors are here, but God will judge them. Therefore, we must persevere (1:1–12).
- Antichrist is not yet here, but Jesus Christ will defeat him. Therefore, we must stand firm (2:1–17).
- Disobedient people are among us, and they must be admonished. Therefore, do not grow weary in doing good (3:1–18).

Encouragement regarding Jesus’ Coming in 2 Thessalonians

- Jesus Christ will come and punish those who persecute His church (1:6).
- Jesus Christ will be glorified by his saints at his coming (1:10).
- The Day of the Lord will not take place until the Man of Lawlessness is revealed (2:3).
- Jesus Christ will summarily defeat the antichrist when He comes (2:8).

Prayers for Believers in 2 Thessalonians

- Thanking God for the spiritual growth of the believers (1:3–4)
- Praying for God to be glorified by the perseverance of the believers (1:11–12)
- Thanking God for choosing to save the believers (2:13)
- Praying for God’s comfort for the believers through his grace (2:16–17)
- Praying for God to be glorified by the gospel’s advance (3:1)
- Praying for God to protect those who are proclaiming the gospel (3:2)
- Praying for God’s grace in the believers’ endurance (3:5)
- Praying for God’s peace in the believers’ lives (3:16)

“As for you, brothers, do not grow weary in doing good” (2 Thess 3:13).

Responding in Prayer from 2 Thessalonians

- For my own heart: thanking God for choosing to save me (2:13)
- For my brothers and sisters in Christ: thanking God for his work in them (1:3)
- For my church: that WBC would stand firm and hold to God’s Word (2:15)