

2 Thessalonians

Background

- The last time Paul, Silas, and Timothy are reported as being together is in Corinth (Acts 18:5), but a later reunion is not excluded. Paul remained in Corinth 18 months (Acts 18:11).
- The similarity of the subject matter may indicate a time not long after 1 Thessalonians.

Encouragements (1:1 – 12)

- The opening encouragement is very similar to that of 1 Thessalonians 1:1 – 2:13 with some minor differences.
 - Certain encouragements bear frequent repetition
 - Grace and peace (1:2). The letter should be viewed as an outgrowth of the grace of God and should result in peace for the reader as in 1 Thessalonians 1:1.
 - Growth in faith, love, and patience (1:3 – 4) as in 1 Thessalonians 1:3.
 - Walking worthy (1:5, 11) as in 1 Thessalonians 2:12.
 - Overcoming despite affliction (1:4 – 5) as in 1 Thessalonians 1:6, 2:14 – 16, 3:3 – 4).
 - God will repay with tribulation those who trouble you (1:6 – 10) as in 1 Thessalonians 2:15 – 16).
 - Judgment Day (1:7, 2:1 – 12) is future, as in 1 Thessalonians 4:13 – 5:11).
 - Some new encouragements
 - Previously, the adversaries were receiving present distress (1 Thessalonians 2:16). In this letter (1:9), the adversaries will be punished at the final judgment.
 - Paul boasted of their faith and patience to other congregations (1:4).

Restoring the hope of the Last Day (2:1 – 17)

- Encouragement was turned to discouragement by unsupported assertions (2:1 – 2). 1 Thessalonians 2:1 – 12 gave details of “our gathering together to Him.”
- Some caused discouragement by convincing arguments that the day of the Lord had already come.
 - As today, mixing predictions concerning the destruction of Jerusalem with descriptions of Judgment Day cause confusion and unnecessary anxiety.
 - Easy method for distinguishing the two:
 - If there are signs, it is not Judgment Day (1 Thessalonians 5:2, 2 Peter 3:10, Matthew 24:35 – 44, Luke 12:39 – 40).
 - If anyone remains on earth afterwards, it is not Judgment Day.
 - If it is described as “everlasting,” it is Judgment Day.
 - If the two events are mixed, various Scriptures will no longer be physically possible, so they are declared to be “spiritual.” Or, the “prophetic perfect” verb tense is invoked. Complex explanations to avoid the simple meanings destroy hope as believers give up on understanding.
 - Example: Charles Taze Russell predicted the end would occur in 1873. When it did not happen, he re-calculated a new date of 1898. His third prediction was 1914. When nothing happened, he replied, “I saw Jesus return. Did you miss it?”

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- Paul reminded the Thessalonians Christians that they knew that certain predictions remained to be accomplished; the end could not occur until after that time.
 - Before 70 AD, Christians could be certain that the end of the universe could not come until after the Temple in Jerusalem was destroyed, as predicted in Daniel 9:26.
 - As long as legitimate prophets and unclean spirits existed, the end could not come, or Zechariah 13:1 – 6 would fail.
 - The details of the “man of lawlessness” have not been preserved for us. But, those details are not important for us, since they occurred a long time ago (in the era of the original readers, 2:7).
 - This description, however, does parallel well with the description of the second beast (Revelation 13:11 – 18) or the false prophet (Revelation 16:13 – 14, 19:20).
 - They caused worship of Satan’s beast.
 - They performed great signs.
 - The army of the rider of the white horse captured the beast and the false prophet and cast them in the lake of fire.
 - Paul described something similar to the elders of Ephesus (Acts 20:29 – 30). Jesus suggested that “even the elect” might be deceived (Matthew 24:24).
 - 2 Timothy 4:3 – 4 describes a time when people would choose fables over truth.
 - God is said to have hardened Pharaoh’s heart (Exodus 9:12), yet Pharaoh is said to have hardened his own heart (Exodus 8:32). David is said to be incited by Satan (1 Chronicles 21:1), yet the action is also ascribed to God (2 Samuel 24:1). The explanation that “God allowed it to happen” does not really help, leaving no boundaries for using that explanation for anything, making God responsible for all sorts of evil. Rather, God used evil beings (both evil spirits and evil people) to accomplish what was needed for His plan. God appealed to their own evil to entice them to further evil. In 2 Thessalonians 2:11, those who had already rejected the truth were enticed to more ridiculous beliefs. For example, Satan, in his wrath over losing the war in heaven, set out to afflict God’s people on earth (Revelation 12). In his self-delusion, his actions resulted in the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple, exactly as God had predicted. Throughout history, God has manipulated those with evil intentions into thinking they were succeeding in their own evil plans when, in reality, they were accomplishing a piece of God’s plan and their own destruction.
- In contrast to the deception around them, the Thessalonians Christians were a source of thanksgiving by Paul to God (2:13 – 17).
 - Election has two parts: (1) The Spirit reserves people for godly purposes, and (2) we have faith in the truth.
 - The purpose of the calling of the gospel is to obtain the glory of Jesus.
 - Paul prays that their hearts be comforted in this time of afflicting and deception, and that God will strengthen them for spreading the gospel and doing good works.

Closing encouragements (3:1 – 5)

- Being asked to pray for someone else imparts encouragement in that the one asking is showing confidence in the effectiveness of their prayers
 - Swift progress of the spread of the gospel

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- Relief for Paul and company from affliction, even though that affliction is to be expected (1:5, 1 Thessalonians 3:3).
- Paul reminds them of the promise of God that Satan will have no power over them (3:3). Obviously, Satan had had an effect on Paul (1 Thessalonians 2:18), the Christians of Thessalonica (1 Thessalonians 5), and outsiders (2:9 – 12). In what way does God “guard” them?
- Paul expresses confidence that they will continue in love and patience in the same manner as they have to this point.

Managing the lazy (3:6 – 15)

- In every age, some have believed themselves to be “entitled.”
- “Disorderly,” and “not walking according to the tradition” are descriptions of those who will not work and expect the church to take care of them, not those who have different ideas about the application of the gospel. Paul cites his own example of working to support himself.
 - Does this apply to modern clergy?
 - Does this apply to the modern entitlement class?
- Paul cautioned them, in dealing with the lazy, not to grow weary of doing good.
- Paul’s cure is to refrain from hanging out with the lazy so they will be ashamed of their behavior. How does this work?

Final closing (3:17 – 18)

- Paul began with grace and peace and ended in the same way.
- The initiative of God (grace) and managing life on earth (peace) are the two primary concepts.

A few notes on encouragement:

- Philippians 2:1 If there is any encouragement in Christ
- Hebrews 10:24 Consider one another in order to stir up love and good works
- 1Thessalonians 5:11 Therefore encourage one another, and build up one another, just as you also are doing
- The same Greek word is also translated beseech, comfort, desire, exhort, entreat, and pray. It is the verb form of the noun that describes the Holy Spirit as the “Helper.”
- If the letters in the New Testament were to be viewed as encouragements, how might this change understanding?
- In a practical way, how can we encourage Christians in other places?
- Is encouragement part of our job?