

INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY OF

2 Thessalonians

Second Thessalonians is the fourteenth (and middle) book of the New Testament, preceding 1 Timothy. It was written about A.D. 50 by the apostle Paul to the church in Thessalonica, a seaport of Macedonia in northern Greece.

Why a second letter? Just a few weeks earlier, Paul had written the same church about Christ's return to raise the dead and gather His people to Himself. That Day of the Lord would come as a thief in the night, he wrote (1 Thess. 4:13-17; 5:1-11). The first letter may have caused some to overreact by quitting jobs, selling goods, and expecting the eternal kingdom to immediately appear. Others may have believed that Christ had already come in secret (2:2). Now Paul writes a second epistle to correct misunderstandings from the first one.

In this way, 2 Thessalonians is a twin to 1 Thessalonians. It resembles, too, another "second" letter of three chapters that deals with the delay of Christ's return: 2 Peter (esp. ch. 3).

Second Thessalonians has one purpose: to correct error regarding the imminence of the Day of the Lord. After a traditional salutation, thanksgiving, and prayer (1:1-6), Paul serves notice of his main theme (1:7-10). Then the thrust of this singular message is presented (2:1-15). An extended blessing and farewell begins late in chapter 2 (v. 16) and continues through chapter 3. It digresses to warn those who, due to wrong ideas about Christ's immediate return, were idle and disorderly (3:6-15). Beyond this urgent message of waiting for Christ and related cautions, no secondary themes are developed in the letter.

Salvation summary

- grace of God and our Lord Jesus Christ (1:2, 12; 2:16)
- calling and obedience to the gospel (1:8, 11; 2:13, 14)
- faith/belief and love of the truth (1:3, 10; 2:10, 12, 13)

- sanctification by the Spirit (2:13)
- doing His good will by good words and works (1:11; 2:17; 3:13)
- glorification with Christ at His coming (1:10, 12; 2:14)

Troubles that hinder: persecution, busybodies, disorderliness, refusal to work (1:4-7; 3:2, 3)

Traditions that help: hard work for self-support; church discipline (2:15; 3:6)

Try this: No work; no food (3:10).

Second Thessalonians in a sentence

To a church stressed by persecution without and disorder within, Paul warns of apostasy and the Antichrist before the Day of the Lord and urges steadfast faith in Christ and diligent labor for daily needs.

Crux of the epistle: Chapter 2 is raw material from which Bible students have quarried many a theory about Antichrist, the future, etc. Regarding this chapter . . .

What is the topic? The coming of the Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him (2:1).

What were the readers not to do? Be shaken in mind, troubled, or deceived by any means to think that the Day of the Lord had already come (2:2, 3).

What will happen before the Day of the Lord? The falling away (apostasy) must come first, and the man of sin (son of perdition) must be revealed (2:3).

Man of sin? Yes, a lawless one who opposes and exalts himself as God to be worshipped in the temple (2:4, 8).

Was this man of sin revealed then? No. Paul recognizes sinful forces that would lead to his disclosure, as well as forces that would delay it (2:6-8).

How would this man of sin appear? He would be energized by Satan, with deceiving signs and wonders. Many who loved evil more than God's truth would be duped and deluded by him (2:9-12).

What is the fate of this man of sin? He will be destroyed when the Lord returns; those deceived by Him shall perish also (2:8, 10, 12; 1:7-10).

Who is this man of sin? Paul does not say, so we must seek his identity elsewhere. Most students connect him with the little horn and blasphemous power of Daniel, the Antichrist of John's epistles, and the beast power of Revelation. A variety of historical figures have been suggested: Nero, the papacy, Hitler, etc. A popular theory today places him yet future — a last great Antichrist who will preside over a Great Tribulation just prior to Christ's final coming in glory.