

2 THESSALONIANS

verse by verse



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Bible Study Guide

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CHAPTER 1
2 THESSALONIANS 1
PAUL ENCOURAGES THOSE EXPERIENCING PERSECUTION /
1:1–12

Paul wrote this letter from Corinth less than a year after he wrote 1 Thessalonians. He and his companions, Timothy and Silas, had visited Thessalonica on Paul's second missionary journey (**Acts 17:1–10**). They established the church there, but Paul had to leave suddenly because of persecution. This prompted him to write his first letter (1 Thessalonians), which contains words of comfort and encouragement. Paul then heard how the Thessalonians had responded to his letter. The good news was that they were continuing to grow in their faith. But the bad news was that false teachings about Christ's return were spreading, leading many to quit their jobs and wait for the end of the world. So Paul wrote to the Thessalonians again. While the purpose of Paul's first letter was to comfort the Thessalonians with the assurance of Christ's second coming, the purpose of this second letter was to correct false teaching about the Second Coming.

1:1 “Paul, and Silvanus, and Timotheus, unto the church of the Thessalonians in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ:”

- At the writing of this epistle, all three of these men (Paul, Silas, and Timothy) were in Corinth (**Acts 18:5**). A few months earlier, Timothy had gone back to Thessalonica to check on the believers there and had returned to Paul with the good news of their faith (**1 Thessalonians 3:5–6**). Paul had written 1 Thessalonians to express his great joy as well as to answer some questions. But some time had passed, and Paul had heard about some other problems in Thessalonica: The church was still facing persecution, false teachers were giving wrong information about the Second Coming, and some of the believers had stopped working in order to wait for Christ's return.
- **To the church of the Thessalonians in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.** Thessalonica was the capital and largest city of the Roman province of Macedonia. It was one of the wealthiest and most flourishing trade centers in the Roman Empire. It was a free city, meaning it was allowed self-rule and was exempted from most of the restrictions placed by Rome on other cities. The city had many pagan religions and cultural influences that challenged the Christians' faith.
- Paul had planted the Church of the Thessalonians when he and his companions visited Thessalonica on their second missionary journey (**Acts 17:1-10**). This assembly of believers was *in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ* meaning

that at salvation God took them out of Adam and placed them into Christ (**I Corinthians 1:30; Colossians 3:3**) and not only were they positioned in Christ, but they were also conditionally abiding in Christ.

- The Thessalonian believers had strong faith, for despite persecution, they had endured. So strong was their faith, wrote Paul, that they had become “an example to all the Christians in Greece (**1 Thessalonians 1:7–8**).

1:2 “Grace unto you, and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”

- Paul began all of his epistles with a greeting of *grace and peace*. “Grace” is God’s unmerited favor bestowed upon sinful people, and “peace,” the Bible speaks of three kinds of peace. **Romans 5:1** speaks of making “peace with God,” this verse states “peace from God,” and **Colossians 3:15** talks of “the peace of God.” By calling God *our Father* (Greek, *patros*), Paul presented God as the Father of all believers (**Galatians 4:4-7**). If God is our Father, then all Christians form the family of God.

1:3 “We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is meet, because that your faith groweth exceedingly, and the charity of every one of you all toward each other aboundeth;”

- Regardless of the contents of Paul’s letters, his style was affirming. Paul began most of his letters by stating what he most appreciated about his readers and the joy he felt because of their faith. In 1 Thessalonians, Paul had commended the Thessalonians for their faith, love, and hope (**1 Thessalonians 1:3**). This verse commends their faith and love.
- Paul had prayed that the Thessalonians’ faith would deepen and that their love would grow and overflow (1 Thessalonians 3:10, 12; 4:10). In the months since he had last written them, Paul could see that their faith was *flourishing* and that they were *all growing in love for each other*. Internal growth is like that of an oak tree. The word translated “growing” (*pleonazei*) is also a strong verb picturing something that spreads out or disperses widely; like floodwaters. The Thessalonians’ internal faith was flourishing like a healthy plant; their external love was spreading out to many (**1 Thessalonians 3:12**).
- Considering the persecution they continued to endure (1:4; **1 Thessalonians 1:6**). It is no wonder Paul *always* thanked God in his prayers for these believers. Paul was not flattering them; the praise he gave them, both in the first letter (**1**

Thessalonians 1:4–10) and here, was sincere. God had truly been working in these believers' lives.

1:4 “So that we ourselves glory in you in the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that ye endure:”

- In 1:3 Paul commends the believers' faith and love; here he commends their hope as he speaks of their *patience/endurance*. In **1 Thessalonians 1:3**, where Paul also commended their faith, love, and hope (or anticipation), he referred to the believers' hope as being inspired by “patience or endurance.” Their endurance proved that their hope was strong and secure.

Persevering in difficulty would be worth little without faith and love as the motivators. So after Paul commended their faith and love in 1:3, he wrote, *We proudly tell God's other churches about your endurance and faithfulness in all the persecutions and hardships you are suffering.*

- Paul had been persecuted during his first visit to Thessalonica (**Acts 17:5–9**). No doubt those who had responded to his message and had become Christians were continuing to face “persecutions and hardships” caused by both Jews and Gentiles. The present tense, “that you endure,” points out that Paul was speaking of present realities.
- In Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians, he wrote that Christ's return would bring deliverance from persecution, and judgment on the persecutors. But this caused the people to expect Christ's return right away to rescue and vindicate them. So Paul had to point out that while waiting for God's kingdom, believers' faith and endurance will be perfected through suffering.

1:5 “Which is a manifest token of the righteous judgment of God, that ye may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which ye also suffer:”

- In what way will the Thessalonians' endurance and faith during persecution and suffering be *evidence that God's judgment is right*? The word “judgment” should be understood as God's righteous decision to allow suffering in this world to perfect his people. God has chosen to build his people's character through the difficulties they experience during their lives in this evil world.
- Persecution and suffering are unavoidable for Christians, for Jesus said, “Since they [the unbelievers] persecuted me, naturally they will persecute you.... The people of the world will hate you because you belong to me” (**John 15:20–21**). Paul understood that believers would “enter into the Kingdom of God through

many tribulations” (**Acts 14:22**) and that “if we are to share his glory, we must also share his suffering” (**Romans 8:17**). Therefore, the fact that the Thessalonians were being allowed to suffer for their faith and the fact that in doing so their faith, love, and hope were increasing and strengthening (1:3–4) were *evidence that God’s judgment [was] right*. In suffering, God’s people can remember that they *will be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which [they] are suffering*. Suffering is not a prerequisite to salvation, not something to do in order to receive salvation. But suffering and enduring faith in the midst of the suffering shows God’s work in believers’ lives and thus reveals Christ-likeness and their worthiness for his kingdom.

1:6–7 “**Seeing it is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you; And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels,**”

- Those who accept Christ’s sacrifice and abide in Him find themselves at odds with the evil world. Persecution and suffering have been the lot of many Christians throughout the ages. One day, however, God will pay back trouble to those who trouble his people. Justice will be served; God will see to it that those who inflicted persecution and suffering will themselves receive much worse. “Those who don’t believe in Christ will never experience eternal life, but the wrath of God remains upon them” (**John 3:36**). Not only will God pay back evildoers, but he will also give relief to those of us who are troubled (**Revelation 6:9-11**). Paul placed himself and his companions along with the Thessalonian believers as people who needed rest and “relief” from God.
- So when will this happen? While those enduring suffering would wish for a quick judgment, it may be that the payback does not occur in this life. But *this will happen* for sure *when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his powerful angels*. The Lord Jesus “will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God” (**1 Thessalonians 4:16**). The word translated “revealed” is *apokalypsis*, literally meaning “unveiling.” Jesus has been to earth before, and he will one day return; this will be His “second coming.” In the meantime he has been hidden from view in heaven with God. But on that great day, Christ will be “revealed” to all mankind. The “powerful angels” are also described in **Matthew 25:31; 1 Thessalonians 3:13; Revelation 5:11; 12:7**. Christ’s return will be unmistakable.

1:8 “**In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ:**”

- When the Lord Jesus returns, He will “avenge” (**Romans 12:19**). The act of “taking vengeance” belongs to God alone; he will deliver the vengeance that unbelievers deserve. **Deuteronomy 32:35** says: “It is mine to avenge; I will repay. In due time their foot will slip; their day of disaster is near and their doom rushes upon them.” This describes all unbelievers; their willful rejection of God and of the gospel message.

1:9–10 “Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power; When he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe (because our testimony among you was believed) in that day.”

- Paul has explained who will be punished and when; this passage explains what that judgment will be: *They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord.* The word “punished” pictures those who are rebellious to God receiving their just due. At Christ’s return, there will be only two groups of people: those who belong to him and those who do not. Jesus told a parable about this in **Matthew 25:31–46**. Those who belong to Jesus will enter into his everlasting kingdom; those who do not will face “everlasting destruction,” described in Revelation as the lake of fire. The scene is described in **Revelation 20:11–15**: *And I saw a great white throne, and I saw the one who was sitting on it. The earth and sky fled from his presence, but they found no place to hide. I saw the dead, both great and small, standing before God’s throne. And the books were opened, including the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to the things written in the books, according to what they had done.... They were all judged according to their deeds. And death and the grave were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death; the lake of fire. And anyone whose name was not found recorded in the Book of Life was thrown into the lake of fire.*
- Revelation describes “books” being opened; I take this to mean the sixty-six books of the Bible. The Book of Life contains the names of those who have put their trust in Christ to save them. All whose names are not recorded in the Book of Life have not placed their faith in Jesus Christ. There are no gray areas in God’s judgment. Those who have not identified with Christ and trusted Him as Savior will have no hope, no second chance, no other appeal (**1 Thessalonians 5:3**). To be “punished with everlasting destruction” means to be eternally separated from God; being *shut out* from his presence. This will be the ultimate punishment. “Shut out from his presence” implies not obliteration or total destruction but a conscious, everlasting life of punishment that is the opposite of what believers face (**Matthew 25:41–46**). The unbelievers will be banned or excluded from the presence of God, who is the Source of life.

- The believers, persecuted and weak as they may be, however, have the Lord on their side. The power of the oppressors is meaningless when compared to Almighty God. For those oppressors, the Lord's presence will be terrifying. *On the day he comes, Christ will be glorified in his holy people and ... marveled at among all those who have believed.* The day of grief for the rebellious will be a day of celebration for believers. Jesus Christ will return in "blazing fire" (1:8); then he will *be glorified in his holy people.* He will impart to his people; those alive and those who have died (**1 Thessalonians 4:16–17**); his glory. First Corinthians describes believers' resurrected bodies: "Our bodies now disappoint us, but when they are raised, they will be full of glory. They are weak now, but when they are raised, they will be powerful" (**1 Corinthians 15:43**). Believers will see Christ's glory, and they will share it. "Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is" (**1 John 3:2**).

1:11 "Wherefore also we pray always for you, that our God would count you worthy of this calling, and fulfil all the good pleasure of his goodness, and the work of faith with power:"

- Paul and his fellow missionaries kept on praying for the Thessalonian believers, just as Paul prayed for all the churches. What were Paul and his fellow missionaries praying for? First, *that our God will make you worthy of the life to which he called you.* To be made "worthy" has the same meaning here as it did in 1:5. Salvation is sure, but to live out one's faith is a life-long maturing process. The "calling" from God is that his people become like Christ (**Romans 8:29**) so that we can all have the same relationship with God the Father that Jesus the Son had with Him. This calling is a gradual, lifelong process that will be completed when we see Christ face to face (**1 John 3:2**). To be worthy of this calling means that Christ is living out His life in and through us (**Galatians 2:20**). Paul wrote to the church in Ephesus, "I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called" (**Ephesians 4:1**). God has chosen/elected his people to be Christ's representatives on earth, living the Christ-life for the world to see, and having the awesome privilege of being called Christ's very own.
- Second, they were praying that God, *by his grace [would] fulfill all [their] good intentions which comes from Christ within, as well as the work that faith produces.* **Philippians 2:13** says, "For it is God who works in you to will and to do His good pleasure."

1:12 “That the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and ye in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.”

- Paul wanted the Thessalonians to show, by God’s grace, such qualities of character, such good purposes, and acts of faith (1:11), *that the name of [the] Lord Jesus [would] be glorified in [them], and [them] in him*. As believers walk in the Spirit, they will glorify Christ through their actions, words, thoughts, and motives. When believers by grace through faith, live out the Christ-life and glorify Christ, Christ is glorified in them.
- Before his death on the cross, Jesus prayed, “Father, the time has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you” (**John 17:1**). God would glorify his Son through the Crucifixion and Resurrection, and the Son, in turn, would glorify the Father by giving eternal life to the believers.
- This can only happen *according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ*. Believers cannot show Christ’s glory or be glorified in him because of anything they do; it is only because of God’s grace. Only by God’s grace did Jesus come to die for sinners; only by God’s grace can people believe and receive his sacrifice and be saved from their sins.

CHAPTER 2
2 THESSALONIANS 2
PAUL PREDICTS THE COMING OF THE ANTICHRIST / 2:1–12

It seems that some of the Thessalonian believers had latched onto wrong teaching regarding Christ's second coming (2:1–3) and what would happen in the world before he returned. Paul had already taught them much when he was with them and had explained more in his first letter (1 Thessalonians 4–5). This letter tells of a time of great rebellion against God led by a man of lawlessness (the Antichrist). God will remove all the restraints on evil before he brings his final judgment.

2:1–2 “Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him, That ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand.”

- This introduces the main topic of this letter and Paul's reason for writing to these *brothers* in the faith in Thessalonica. He had already taught them *concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to Him*. Paul's first letter answered questions regarding the believers who had died, for there was concern that they had missed out on heaven. Another concern was that the expectation of Christ's return was causing some to become complacent and to just sit and wait. So Paul's first letter explained that Jesus would come suddenly (1 **Thessalonians 5:1–4**) and that believers who had already died would rise out of their graves to meet him while those on earth would be “caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air” (1 **Thessalonians 4:17**). Here in 2:1 Paul states that believers will be “gathered to him.” Paul used *episyngogue*, a word also used in **Hebrews 10:25**, where it refers to an assembly “meeting” for worship. Jesus also expressed his desire to “gather” his people (**Matthew 23:37; Luke 13:34**).
- Apparently Paul had heard further questions from these believers, so he added more detail regarding what would happen at Christ's second coming. Also, he knew that persecution was taking its toll on the believers, spiritually and physically (1 **Thessalonians 1:6; 2 Thessalonians 1:4–7**).
- Verse 2 describes false teachings about Christ's second coming. Some were saying *that the day of the Lord has already come*. “Day of the Lord,” a common phrase in the Old Testament, refers to some extraordinary happening, whether a present event, an event in the near future, or the final period of history when God will defeat all the forces of evil (**Isaiah 13:6, 9; Ezekiel 30:3; Amos 5:18, 20**;

Obadiah 1:15; Zephaniah 1:7, 14; Zechariah 14:1; Malachi 4:5). The description always pictures great suffering and punishment for sinners. In the book of Joel, for example, the phrase “day of the LORD” refers to a time of destruction to come upon the nation of Judah for its sin (**Joel 1:15; 2:1, 11, 31; 3:14**).

- Even when the “day of the Lord” refers to a present event, it always foreshadows the final Day of the Lord, to which this verse refers. This final event of history has two aspects to it: (1) the Last Judgment on all evil and sin; (2) the final reward for faithful believers. At that time God will intervene directly in world affairs. Righteousness and truth will prevail, and Christ will judge sin and set up his eternal kingdom. First there will be much suffering, however, for evil will crescendo as the end draws near.
- False teachers were saying that the “Day of the Lord” had come. These false teachers had claimed to have had some prophecy, report or letter from Paul and his companions apparently stating what the false teachers were teaching. Paul does not identify the source of this false teaching any further.
- But when Christ didn’t come, when suffering continued or intensified, the believers were becoming *unsettled* and *alarmed*. The believers certainly wondered if they had somehow missed out or if they were not going to be saved. Paul assured them that they should not be worried by these false teachers.
- Paul simply wrote that the Day of the Lord had not yet come; three other events would have to happen first: (1) The rebellion must occur (2:3); (2) the man of lawlessness must be revealed (2:3); (3) the restraint of lawlessness must be removed (2:7).

2:3 “Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition;”

- The coming of the Lord will be “like a thief in the night” (**I Thessalonians 5:2**); even so, certain events will precede it. The final Day of the Lord *will not come until “a falling away” occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed*. This falling away or rebellion will be a massive revolt against God. While rebellion or falling away from God seems widespread even today, as the coming of Christ nears, this apostasy and active opposition against God will intensify.
- During the rebellion, a remarkable man will come into public view. He will have considerable power and will personify evil. Throughout history certain individuals

have epitomized evil and been hostile to everything Christ stands for (**1 John 2:18; 4:3; 2 John 1:7**). Certain Roman emperors fell into that category. The preface to the original King James Version of the Bible named the pope as the “Man of Sin.” Hitler and Stalin have been named as well. These “antichrists” have lived in every generation, and others like them will continue to work their evil. Then, just before Christ’s second coming, *the man of lawlessness*, an extremely evil man, will arise. He will be Satan’s tool, equipped with Satan’s power (2:9). This man will oppose all law, both God’s moral laws as well as civil laws. Thus he will promote immorality and anarchy. Jesus warned, “And because of the increase of lawlessness, the love of many will grow cold” (**Matthew 24:12**). This “lawless” man will be *the Antichrist*. He will be in the world, but then he will rise to power and notoriety. The book of Revelation speaks of a “beast,” symbolizing the Antichrist. **Revelation 13:5–8** describes him: *Then the beast was allowed to speak great blasphemies against God. And he was given authority to do what he wanted for forty-two months. And he spoke terrible words of blasphemy against God, slandering his name and all who live in heaven, who are his temple. And the beast was allowed to wage war against God’s holy people and to overcome them. And he was given authority to rule over every tribe and people and language and nation. And all the people who belong to this world worshiped the beast. They are the ones whose names were not written in the Book of Life.*

- The beast symbolizes the Antichrist; who is under Satan’s power and control (**Revelation 16:13 and 19:20**). Satan’s evil will culminate in a final Antichrist, a man who will focus all the powers of evil against Jesus Christ and his followers. Yet even this man, for all the power that he will attain, is ultimately *doomed to destruction*. **Revelation 20:10** describes it: “Then the Devil ... was thrown into the lake of fire that burns with sulfur, joining the beast.... There they will be tormented day and night forever and ever”.
- God still reigns, and his victory is certain. The evil man will be destroyed but not before God uses him. Although this man will be Satan’s tool, God will still have everything under control, and events will proceed just as God has planned. During this time of great rebellion, the full extent of wickedness will be demonstrated and rebellion against God will be shown in all its horror and ugliness. Always, through all suffering throughout the ages, God is drawing people to himself, calling them to repent and turn to him. This will continue during those last days.

2:4 “Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God.”

- As noted above, the book of Revelation prophesies that “all the people who belong to this world [will worship] the beast” (**Revelation 13:8**). In order to be worshiped, this man of lawlessness *will oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshiped*. This man will attempt, and even will seem to be able, to dethrone God and anything else that is worshiped (idols, nature, self) and then will demand worship and obedience to himself alone. The phrase “sets himself up in God’s temple” should not be taken literally; instead, it pictures one who proclaims *himself to be God* and then takes God’s place of residence and rule, claiming it for his own. Many have claimed such power throughout history (Roman rulers, various political leaders), and many have been pointed out by others as being the Antichrist, but this one human, yet to come, will be the final, decisive personification of lawlessness, evil, and rebellion against God. This one man will precede Christ’s return.

2:5 “Remember ye not, that, when I was yet with you, I told you these things?”

- Paul had started the church in Thessalonica and had helped the believers grow into a strong unit that was able to withstand persecution (**Acts 17:1–4; 1 Thessalonians 1:6**). Apparently he had taught them about the second coming of Christ and the end times. He reminded them, *Do you not remember that I told you these things when I was still with you?* Either they had forgotten his teaching, or the false teachers had been confusing them.

2:6–7 “And now ye know what withholdeth that he might be revealed in his time. For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way.”

- In the present world; the world of the Thessalonians and the world today, two events are happening simultaneously. First, the mysterious secret power of lawlessness is already at work although it may not be clearly seen for what it is. The work that the Antichrist, the man of lawlessness, will do is already going on. “Secret” or “mystery” means something hidden, behind the scenes, but it is something that God will reveal. “Lawlessness” is the hidden, subtle, underlying force from which all sin springs. Second, even though this power is working, so is the one who is restraining it. Civilization still has a bit of decency which comes through religion, law enforcement, education, science, and reason. Although we are horrified by criminal acts, the world has yet to see the real horror of complete lawlessness. This will happen when the one who now holds it back...is taken out of the way.

- Who “holds back” or “restrains” lawlessness? Many Bible scholars agree that it is the Holy Spirit. It seems that the Thessalonians knew that answer (*you know what withholds*) from Paul’s previous teaching. So Paul referred to it here but did not repeat it. The Bible does not clearly identify the restrainer, only that he will not restrain forever. Then the man of lawlessness will be revealed and will do his evil work (as described in 2:3-4). Lawlessness, to a certain extent, is already going on, but the man of lawlessness has not yet come; he will be revealed in God’s time. Believers should not fear this time when the restraint is removed; God never created something that he cannot control; He is far stronger than the man of lawlessness, and he will save his people.

2:8 “And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming:”

- After the one who restrains evil is removed, *then the man of lawlessness will be revealed*. For a period of time, he will have great power and act with notorious evil (as noted in 2:2–4). Just as this man of lawlessness will be revealed in God’s timing, however, so he will also be destroyed. There will be an end to this man’s evil. Indeed, when *the Lord Jesus* returns, he *will consume [the Antichrist] with the breath of his mouth*. This picture comes from Isaiah 11:4: “He will rule against the wicked and destroy them with the breath of his mouth”. The picture of Christ “consuming” this powerful evil man with a mere “breath” shows that between God and Satan there is no contest. No matter how powerful this evil man may become, he is no more than a flame to be blown out by the breath of the Lord.
- A further picture is seen in the description that the man of lawlessness will be destroyed *by the splendor of [Christ’s second] coming*. As a mere breath renders the Antichrist powerless, so the very appearance of Christ on the scene will ruin him. John describes this future appearance of Christ: *I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice he judges and makes war. His eyes are like blazing fire, and on his head are many crowns. He has a name written on him that no one knows but he himself. He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is the Word of God. The armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean. Out of his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. “He will rule them with an iron scepter.” He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty. On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS. (Revelation 19:11–16)*

- Christ's title in this passage in Revelation indicates God's sovereignty. Most of the world will be worshipping the beast, the Antichrist, whom they will believe has all power and authority. Then suddenly out of heaven will ride Christ; the King of kings and Lord of lords; and his army. His entrance will signal the end of the false powers.

2:9–10 “Even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved.”

- This verse answers the question that might have been plaguing the Thessalonians, and even modern readers. How will this one man become so powerful? How will he attain such notoriety and loyalty from the masses? The answer is that this man will be Satan's tool, his *coming ... will be in accordance with the work of Satan* and will be *displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders, and in every sort of evil*. Jesus had warned that “false messiahs and false prophets will rise up and perform great miraculous signs and wonders so as to deceive, if possible, even God's chosen ones” (**Matthew 24:24**). If even the numerous antichrists will have extraordinary powers (**1 John 2:18**), this one will be more powerful and able to do signs that are even more extraordinary. When Jesus came, his ministry had “miracles, wonders, and signs” (**Acts 2:22**). Jesus' followers were given power to do “even greater things” (**John 14:12**), as evidenced by Paul's miracle-working power (**Romans 15:18–19; 2 Corinthians 12:12**). But while Jesus and his followers did miracles of compassion for the purpose of bringing glory to God, the Antichrist will do miracles characterized by evil and deceit for the purpose of bringing glory to himself.
- The book of Revelation also describes the power that this evil leader will have (**Revelation 13:13–14; Revelation 16:14; 19:20**).
- It will be this power *that deceives those who are perishing*; those who do not believe *the truth and so be saved*. The Christians will stand firm because they understand what is happening and will not be turned away. The statement that they received not the truth shows that at that point in time God's offer of salvation will still be available. The “truth” refers to the gospel message that offers salvation and eternal life to those who believe it. These people of the earth could turn away from this evil person and find eternal salvation in the truth of the gospel. The evil let loose upon the world will be used by God as a last chance for many. The choice will be crystal clear. Because the Antichrist will have taken

over every other religion (2:4), the only two options will be to worship Christ or to worship the Antichrist. The unbelievers in the world will be so enamored of this powerful person that they will choose to follow him; away from God and into eternal death.

2:11 “And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie:”

- Those who are influenced and controlled by the flesh and follow the Antichrist will be sent by God a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie. They will continue to be deceived further and further. Over against “the truth” of the gospel (2:10) is the lie of the Antichrist, the truth that God is God versus the lie that the Antichrist is God. Satan also deludes: “The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God” (**2 Corinthians 4:4**). God may use Satan as part of his judgment on rebellion. That God sends this delusion shows his sovereignty in this entire event. At no point will God be out of control, even as Satan unleashes his power through the Antichrist. God’s sovereignty is displayed in this way in **Revelation 17:17**: “For God has put in their hearts, to fulfill His will and to agree, and give their kingdom unto the Beast, until the words of God shall be fulfilled.”
- God will use the people’s rebellion as a judgment against them. As condemnation on their sin, God will harden their heart and give them over to unbelief, blinding them so that they can no longer respond to the truth.

2:12 “That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness.”

- The result of their “believing the lie” is that *they will be condemned*. The reason? *For not believing the truth* and for going so far down the path of evil that they don’t even see it as evil; in fact, they are *enjoying the evil*. The path toward condemnation is a downhill slippery slope. It begins with a fascination with evil and leads to an acceptance of a lie and simultaneous rejection of the truth; powerful delusions that lead one deeper into evil so that it is accepted and even enjoyed. At that point, people’s hearts are hardened against God and his Word, for they do not feel any need for either.

BELIEVERS STAND FIRM IN THE FAITH / 2:13–17

Having just painted the picture of the world with the undercurrent of evil waiting to be unleashed, and a period of time when evil will reign and people will worship it, Paul countered by encouraging believers to stand firm in their faith.

2:13 “But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth:”

- Once again, Paul and his companions paused to thank God for what he had done and was continuing to do through the Thessalonian believers; those who believe have a glorious future. Paul consistently taught that salvation begins and ends with God. People can do nothing to be saved on their own merit; all must accept God’s free gift of salvation. There is no other way to receive forgiveness from sin. Paul was encouraging the Thessalonian believers by reminding them that they had been chosen by God from the beginning.
- Salvation comes to those who believe *in the truth*; that is, they accept the gospel message of salvation through Christ. Then a process begins by which believers are sanctified or made *holy* like Christ. This is a gradual, lifelong process that will be completed when believers see Christ face-to-face. “Beloved, we are God’s children now; what we will be has not yet been revealed. However, when he is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is” (1 John 3:2).

2:14 “Whereunto he called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

- God’s “call” came to these Thessalonians through Paul, Silas, Timothy, and others to tell the Good News to the Thessalonians so *that [they] might share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ*. The Thessalonians were facing persecution for their faith; Paul had just finished describing a time on earth of even more intense persecution. There was no doubt about the outcome. Those who believe will share in Christ’s glory when he comes to restore justice on the earth (1:5–10). Believers will progressively reflect his glory as they are drawn into a deeper relationship with Christ and are molded into the image of Christ.

2:15 “Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle.”

- Paul knew that the Thessalonians would face pressure from persecution, false teachers, worldliness, and apathy to waver from the truth and to leave the faith. *With all these things in mind*, Paul urged them to *stand firm in the truths* that Paul and his companions had taught. The Thessalonians had received much teaching in person, and they had Paul’s letters.

- It takes faith to stand firm when persecution becomes intense, (**Mark 13:13; Hebrews 3:6; I Corinthians 16:13**).

2:16–17 “Now our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God, even our Father, which hath loved us, and hath given us everlasting consolation and good hope through grace, Comfort your hearts, and stablish you in every good word and work.”

- This prayer is similar to the one at the end of the main section of his first letter (**1 Thessalonians 3:11–13**). Notice that Paul gave the full title of the *Lord Jesus Christ*, showing his majesty and power. Through grace; undeserved kindness, God/Christ gave ... *eternal consolation/ encouragement and good hope* to the believers. Christianity is not a faith of questions and worries, not a faith in which believers must wait until the end to see if they will make it. Instead, believers are given hope and encouragement through the certainty of God’s promises.
- In **John 3:27**, John the Baptist made this statement: “If a man has anything, it came from God” (paraphrased). If we give a gift to someone, where did that gift come from? The answer: God. If a person has faith, where did it come from? God. If someone loves others or loves God, where does that love come from? The answer again is God.
- So here Paul makes it very clear that it is God who comforts and strengthens our hearts (mind/will/emotions) so that we have the power and desire to do His good pleasure (**Philippians 2:13**).

CHAPTER 3
2 THESSALONIANS 3
PAUL REQUESTS PRAYER / 3:1–5

Paul had been writing about the future, describing the coming of the Antichrist and the future days of rebellion and lawlessness. That man of evil has not yet come because he is being held back. Yet, even so, Paul stated that “the secret power of lawlessness is already at work” (2:7). Evil is at work in the world, but it is also being held in check. What does that mean for Christians? How then are they to live in this present evil world as they are look forward to the next?

3:1 “Finally, brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may have free course, and be glorified, even as it is with you:”

- Paul prayed regularly for the believers in the various churches, and he did not hesitate to ask for their prayers in return. So here, as he prepared to offer final words of advice to the *brothers and sisters* in Thessalonica, he first asked them to pray for him and his fellow missionaries (the Greek word means “keep on praying”). The focus of Paul’s desire was *that the word of the Lord may spread rapidly and be glorified everywhere, just as it is among you*. The “word of the Lord” as used here may be contrasted with the word of the false teachers (2:2, 15). The Greek word for “spread rapidly” (*treche*) literally pictures a runner, perhaps like one who would participate in races in the Isthmian Games held in Corinth. Paul saw the gospel message “running” across the known world, finding converts in every place, just as it had in Thessalonica. The preaching of God’s Word would result in honor being given to the Lord because of His grace, mercy, love and goodness bestowed on sinful man.

3:2 “And that we may be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men: for all men have not faith.”

- In addition to praying for more converts, Paul asked the believers to also pray *that we may be rescued from wicked and evil people*. As God’s truth advances, it always faces severe opposition. The spiritual battle is often intense for people’s souls. Thus, the missionaries requested prayer for safety. In Greek, the phrase “wicked and evil people” has a definite article, so Paul was referring to a particular group, perhaps some of those who opposed him in Corinth (**Acts 18:12**). These people were “wicked and evil” because they did not have a believing response to the gospel.

3:3 “But the Lord is faithful, who shall stablish you, and keep you from evil.”

- While many people may be without faith, that does not change the fact that *the Lord is faithful*. As at the end of his first letter (**1 Thessalonians 5:24**), Paul reminded the believers of God’s faithfulness: God can be depended upon to keep his promises, he is loyal, and he is constant.
- Because of that loyal, constant faithfulness, God will strengthen and protect believers from evil. Because the Lord is faithful, he will protect his gospel message, and it will continue to spread across the world and achieve His results (**Isaiah 58:11**). Because the Lord is faithful, he will strengthen and protect the believers. This does not mean that they will never face difficulties; it just means that God is faithful. Although there have been and will be persecutions, death, difficulties, suffering, problems, and even failing churches, there will be no ultimate defeat because God has already won the war. Neither His Word nor His church will fail, because God is faithful. Through any situation, God can be depended upon to strengthen and protect His people. The end result for all believers will be eternity with God. That promise will never change.
- Yet even so, God desires His people to be involved in what he is doing. As the missionaries spread God’s message, they understood that they were in a spiritual battle; the faithful Lord with them, evil against them. They realized that they were not involved in a merely human endeavor; they were on the Lord’s battlefields, under his command, with his authority, knowing they would win, yet needing his continual involvement.

3:4 “And we have confidence in the Lord touching you, that ye both do and will do the things which we command you.”

- Christ is faithful, but his followers are not always faithful. Paul had *confidence in the Lord concerning* the Thessalonians. His confidence rested not in the Thessalonians themselves but in God who had chosen them. They had more than shown their hunger for the teachings of the apostles, even as they had experienced persecution. Paul knew that God would strengthen them so that they could go on doing the things that [he commanded]. Believers at this time did not have the New Testament, so they must listen carefully to the teachings of the apostles, which came from God.
- Paul may have been referring to the specific command to pray, which he had just mentioned in the previous verses, or, more likely, these words are a prelude to the following verses that give practical advice regarding living out the faith (Paul used the word “command” again in 3:6).

- Faith and obedience are bound up in the same bundle. He that obeys God, trusts God; and he that trusts God, obeys God.

Charles H. Spurgeon

- Obedience comes from faith (**Romans 1:5**); *I will show you my faith by my works* (**James 2:18b**).

3:5 “And the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God, and into the patient waiting for Christ.”

- Paul’s prayer for these believers was that the Lord would direct their hearts. “Direct” means to keep their hearts (souls: mind, will, emotions) occupied with God’s love for them, and the assurance that He would one day return. Faith in His love and faithfulness would enable them to face and overcome any and all difficulties.

PAUL ADMONISHES THE CHURCH AGAINST LAZINESS / 3:6–15

Besides the Second Coming, the topic of laziness or complacency among believers takes up the most space in this letter. The fact that Paul had already discussed this in his first letter (**1 Thessalonians 5:14**) shows that the problem had not been solved but had continued. This caused Paul great concern, so he gave stern commands.

3:6 “Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us.”

- Paul had already discussed the issue of idle Christians in the first letter, but apparently the problem had continued (**1 Thessalonians 5:14**). Perhaps Paul’s instruction had not been strong enough, so this passage made it clear that his commands regarding idleness came *with the authority of our Lord Jesus Christ*. The first letter tells Christians to “warn those who are undisciplined/lazy” (**1 Thessalonians 5:14**); that is, the believers were to firmly admonish those who were *ataкта*, a word used for soldiers who would not stay in the ranks. While everyone else was working and serving, some would not. Some were using the excuse of waiting for Christ to return.
- This letter goes a step further regarding these people. No longer are believers told to “warn” these undisciplined people; they are told to *stay away from any Christian who lives in idleness and doesn’t have a strong work ethic*. This refers not to excommunication from the church but to withdrawing intimate fellowship from them.

- By contrast, Paul and his companions had worked hard when they were in Thessalonica. In addition to teaching the gospel, they had “toiled to earn a living so that [their] expenses would not be a burden to anyone” (**1 Thessalonians 2:9**). Paul and his companions had a right to expect support for their ministry, but they had chosen instead to work and to be a good example to the believers.

3:7–8 “For yourselves know how ye ought to follow us: for we behaved not ourselves disorderly among you; Neither did we eat any man's bread for nought; but wrought with labour and travail night and day, that we might not be chargeable to any of you:”

- Paul’s first letter describes how he and his companions had worked during their stay in Thessalonica. They had not been *idle* as these believers were. They did not want to be a *burden* to anyone but wanted to financially support themselves. Paul and his companions probably enjoyed hospitality at various times during their ministry; but Paul’s point was that he did not expect hospitality or impose it on anyone. They had paid for their lodging and their food in Jason’s home (**Acts 17:7**); *with toil and labor [and they] worked night and day*. Paul had been trained as a tent maker (**Acts 18:3**), and he had worked at this job even as he preached the gospel, taught, and built up a body of believers in this city.

3:9 “Not because we have not power, but to make ourselves an ensample unto you to follow us.”

- Paul had made this same point in **1 Thessalonians 2:7**. Paul and the other missionaries had *the right to such help*; that is, they had a right to expect lodging and food in exchange for the message they had brought (**Luke 10:7**; **1 Corinthians 9:7–14**). Most traveling preachers did this, depending for their livelihood on the generosity of their listeners. Paul did not want to be a burden, however, nor did he want to appear to be preaching in order to be housed and fed. In some places he did accept such gifts, but in Thessalonica he did not. So strong was his passion for spreading the gospel message that he would not allow anything to hinder its progress. In this way, the missionaries had made themselves *a model for [the believers] to follow*.

3:10 “For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat.”

- Not only had Paul and Silas been an example of Christian living to the Thessalonians, but they had also explained clearly what was expected. The *command* regarding laziness had been given right from the start; *even when the*

missionaries were with the new believers, teaching them. They had said at that time: *Anyone unwilling to work should not eat*. The saying may have been a common theme among laborers as they worked together or as they trained apprentices. Paul applied it to the Christian life to show believers that laziness, in any form, would not be acceptable.

3:11–12 “For we hear that there are some which walk among you disorderly, working not at all, but are busybodies. Now them that are such we command and exhort by our Lord Jesus Christ, that with quietness they work, and eat their own bread.”

- Here is the reason for Paul’s hard-hitting words on this topic of laziness. “*We hear*”, he wrote. Word had reached Paul in Corinth that some of the believers in Thessalonica were *idle*; meaning that they were refusing to work. So Paul was not the only one concerned about this issue; the believers in Thessalonica had felt that it was so important that they had notified Paul.
- It is possible that these idle people were being idle for “spiritual” reasons. Some people in the Thessalonian church were falsely teaching that because Christ would return any day, people should set aside their responsibilities, quit work, do no future planning, and just wait for the Lord. Or they may have thought that labor was beneath them and wanted to spend their time being spiritual. But not being *busy* only made them *busybodies*. Instead of working, they were minding other people’s business, prying into the private lives of others. They had become a burden to the church, which was supporting them.
- These church members may have thought that they were being more spiritual by not working, but Paul sternly commanded and urged them *to settle down and earn the bread they eat*. That Paul made these statements/commands *in the Lord Jesus* reveals his understanding of his authority as an apostle, as a personal representative of the Lord himself.

3:13 “But ye, brethren, be not weary in well doing.”

- To those hardworking believers, those who were not lazy, Paul said, *Never get tired of doing good*. In contrast to the idlers who had persisted in their idleness even since Paul’s last letter, these hardworking believers should not let the idlers cause them to become dispirited in their work. Paul had written almost the same thing to the Galatians: “Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up” (**Galatians 6:9**). Paul knew that the believers could become discouraged when they tried to do right and received

no word of thanks or saw no tangible results. But Paul challenged all of the believers to keep on doing good and to trust God for the results.

3:14–15 “And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed. Yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother.”

- At the same time that the believers were not to get weary of doing good, they also were not to put up with fellow believers who were being disobedient to Paul’s commands regarding laziness. The believers who were working hard and following Paul’s commands were not expected to support the lazy people in the name of “doing good.” So Paul repeated his direction regarding this issue: *Take note of those who refuse to obey.... Stay away from them* (3:6). The hope was that the idle people would become *ashamed* of their actions and finally become so hungry (when no one would support and feed them) that they would go back to work. Paul counseled the church to stop supporting financially and associating with those who persisted in their idleness. Hunger and loneliness can be very effective ways to make the idle person become productive. Paul was not advising coldness or cruelty, for these people were not *enemies*. They were deceived and misguided, but they were not to be thrown out of the church. They did need a good dose of tough love, however. Verbal warnings had apparently not been enough, for Paul had already offered that in his first letter (**1 Thessalonians 5:14**); now the warnings would be acted out physically.

PAUL’S FINAL GREETINGS / 3:16–18

Paul knew that the church would need to deal with false teaching regarding the Second Coming (as discussed in chapter 2) and with those members who were not living as they should (as discussed in chapter 3). In his closing words, Paul prayed for peace for the church so that it could handle these issues and then continue strong in the work of the ministry.

3:16 “Now the Lord of peace himself give you peace always by all means. The Lord be with you all.”

- Just as Paul began his letter with “grace and peace” (1:2), so he ended it (see 3:18). At the end of his first letter, Paul had prayed for the Thessalonians that the “God of peace” would sanctify them (**1 Thessalonians 5:23**). He knew that the commands he had given could never be carried out by human effort. It would be difficult for the idle people to humbly go back to work; it would be difficult for the annoyed believers to treat these people lovingly yet with a firm hand. Paul did not expect them to do this in their own strength, however, so he prayed that *the Lord of peace himself* would give them *peace at all times in all ways*. Paul referred to

“the God of peace” or “the Lord of peace” often at the end of his letters (**Romans 15:33; 16:20; 2 Corinthians 13:11; Philippians 4:9**). The peace God gives does not mean absence of conflict (**John 14:27; 16:33**). The peace God gives is confident assurance in any circumstance, with no fear of the present or the future. Not only did the believers have peace, but they also had the Lord himself, for he would be with them through his Spirit.

3:17 “The salutation of Paul with mine own hand, which is the token in every epistle: so I write.”

- Usually Paul dictated his letters to a scribe, but at times he would end the letter with a note in his own handwriting (**1 Corinthians 16:21; Galatians 6:11; Colossians 4:18; Philemon 1:19**). This assured the recipients that false teachers were not writing letters in Paul’s name; which was a concern in Thessalonica (2:2). It also gave the letters a personal touch.

3:18 “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.”

- Paul often closed his letters with a prayer of *grace* for the believers. This closing is identical to his first letter (**1 Thessalonians 5:28**). Paul wanted his readers to continue to experience *the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ*. “Grace” is undeserved favor from God to his people.

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