

A LOOK AT THE BOOK
2 Thessalonians
Comfort in the midst of Suffering

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Author and Date

The connection with 1 Thessalonians, plus the evidence from tradition and internal evidence point to Paul as the author of the letter.

The date was several months after 1 Thessalonians, probably in A.D. 51.

Historical Background

They continue to suffer because of their faith in Christ.

Paul still hasn't been able to come to them and is still sending Timothy as his representative.

The persecution has created further theological problems that need to be dealt with.

Some are claiming that they are already in the Day of the Lord.

Purpose and Theme

Paul writes:

1. To comfort and encourage them in the midst of their suffering.
2. To correct the doctrinal confusion concerning the Day of the Lord.
3. To encourage them to stand firm and to hold onto the sound doctrine they have been taught.
4. To obligate those who are idle to go to work.

He wants us to grow in our faith, in spite of the suffering.

He wants us to understand the truth regarding the Day of the Lord.

He wants the lazy to conduct themselves correctly.

The main idea of the letter is comfort in the midst of their suffering.

- He comforts them by demonstrating that suffering serves to produce praise to God.
- Those who are faithful to Him will triumph in the end.

WHAT RESULTS SHOULD THE TRUTHS PRESENTED IN THIS BOOK PRODUCE IN OUR LIVES TODAY?

WHAT DIFFERENCE WILL THIS MAKE?

Organization

The three chapters of the book reveal its three-part structure:

- Paul shares his prayer (1:1-12) that we will be faithful and patient in the midst of suffering because God has given us the privilege of suffering for His name.
- He presents instruction concerning the Day of the Lord (2:1-17)

The present suffering can't be the Day of the Lord because there are two prerequisites that haven't been fulfilled yet.

Keep on being faithful while waiting for your salvation.

- A series of exhortations—Correct the problem of those who are lazy and who are taking illegitimate advantage of the church's brotherly love (3:1-18)

Argument

HIS GREETING 1:1-2

HIS PRAYER 1:3-12

Paul's letter begins with the revelation of his prayer for the church at Thessalonica.

In the prayer he demonstrates his concern for them because of their suffering and his desire that they continue to be faithful so that they will participate in the final triumph.

THANKSGIVING 1:3-10

Cause from their testimony 1:3-4

Paul thanks God for them because they continue to grow in faith and love in spite of adverse conditions.

Growing faith 1:3a

Abounding love 1:3b

Enduring persecution 1:4

Results of their testimony 1:5-10

The result of faithful testimony now will be to participate in the enjoyment of the Lord's triumph over His enemies.

The destiny of those who are faithful to the Lord is contrasted with that of those who oppose the gospel.

The faithful will participate in God's kingdom (1:5)

They will be given rest (1:7)

When Christ comes in victory over His enemies, they will glorify Him (1:10)

In contrast, those who have persecuted them will be repaid what they deserve.

They will receive tribulation (1:6)

They will be punished with everlasting destruction for their unbelief (1:8-9)

PETITION 1:11-12

Paul prays that God will do a work in them so that they will receive the promised blessings that he has just described.

The result will be that God will be glorified by them.

That God will count them worthy 1:11a

That God will fulfill every good purpose 1:11b

That God will be glorified in them 1:12

HIS INSTRUCTION 2:1-17

Paul turns to the doctrinal problem concerning the day of the Lord which is bothering them.

CORRECTION OF A MISTAKEN CONCEPT 2:1-2

Apparently a teacher has come to them, claiming to have been sent by Paul.

He has been claiming that the day of the Lord has already come:

"This tribulation you're going through is what was promised in the Day of the Lord." 2:2

The subject isn't imminency—that He would come soon.

The subject is the Day of the Lord.

This view would require a post-tribulational view.

Paul answers by teaching them "with regard to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him (= the Rapture) 2:1

He corrects this mistaken idea by teaching them about the rapture of the church.

TWO EVIDENCES AGAINST THE PRESENCE OF THE DAY 2:3-10

Paul's answer is that they could not be in the day of the Lord because two notable events must occur previous to its arrival. 2:3

1. The apostasy
2. The revelation of the man of lawlessness

These constitute definitive evidences we can watch for as indicators.

Apostasy 2:3a

The first of these definitive events is an "apostasy" (2:3a)

The normal view of the apostasy is that it refers to a doctrinal deviation from the truth.

The main problem with this view is that apostasy in this sense is not an objectively verifiable, definitive event as Paul uses it here; it is a state.

When does it start?

This would be a state that already existed when Paul spoke.

John indicates that it already existed. 1 John 2:18-19

Gradual intensification of the state to a new climax does not seem to satisfy Paul's use of the term.

Thus the apostasy is not a notable event that could be used at any time to determine if the day of the Lord has begun yet, as Paul uses it here.

How then should we understand it?

It seems better to interpret the word with its non-technical root idea, normally expressed by the verb form.

aphístemi - to depart from, draw away, fall away, refrain from

mid. - depart from, withdraw oneself

apostasía - a falling away, forsaking

Aphístemi - depart from

[All New Testament uses are listed for *all* related words]

Lk. 2:37

"[Anna] . . . And she never *left* the temple, serving night and day"

Lk. 4:13	"And when the devil had finished every temptation, he <i>departed from</i> Him until an opportune time."
Lk. 13:27	"and He will say, 'I tell you, I do not know where you are from; <i>depart from</i> me all you evildoers.'"
Acts 12:10	"and they went out and went along one street; and immediately the angel <i>departed from</i> him."
Acts 15:38	"But Paul kept insisting that they should not take him along who had <i>deserted</i> them in Pamphylia."
Acts 19:9	"But when some were becoming hardened and disobedient, speaking evil of the Way before the multitude, he [Paul] <i>withdrew from</i> them and took away the disciples"
Acts 22:29	"Therefore those who were about to examine him immediately <i>let go of</i> [<i>withdrew from</i>] him;"
2 Cor. 12:8	"Concerning this I entreated the Lord three times that it might <i>depart from</i> me."
1 Tim. 4:1	"But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will <i>fall away from</i> [<i>depart from</i>] the faith"
2 Tim. 2:19	"Let every one who names the name of the Lord <i>abstain from</i> [<i>depart from</i>] wickedness.
Heb. 3:12	"Take care, brethren, lest there should be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart, in <i>falling away from</i> [<i>departing from</i>] the living God."
Acts 5:37-38	"After this man Judas of Galilee rose up in the days of the census, and <i>drew away</i> [<i>got them to depart</i>] some people after him, And so in the present case, I say to you, <i>stay away from</i> [<i>depart from</i>] these men and leave them alone,"
Luke 8:13	"Those on rocky soil . . . believe for a while, and in time of temptation <i>fall away</i> [<i>depart</i>]."
1 Tim. 6:5	". . . men of depraved mind . . . [alternate reading = "from such <i>turn away</i> [<i>depart</i>]]."

Apostasion –certificate of divorce, of dismissal, of separation (Matt. 5:31; 19:7; Mk. 10:4)

Apostasia

Acts 21:21	"you are teaching all the Jews who are among the Gentiles <i>to forsake</i> [<i>departure from</i>] Moses.
2 Thess. 2:3	"It will not come unless the <i>apostasy</i> [<i>departure</i>] comes first"

The verb normally describes a separation or departure (occasionally a figurative use).

The noun in non-biblical usage at first was related to the verb idea and had no religious connotation.

Doctrinal apostasy was a derived meaning.

Extra-biblical use was found at the docks to list ship departures.

Context indicates the type of departure the speaker has in mind.

What is there in the context that will help to clarify the meaning here?

- It's a clearly definable, notable sign.
- Verse 1 clearly refers to a departure.
- This departure is again mentioned in verse 3.

The departure with the definite article attached indicates something well known, *or*, something mentioned in the preceding context.

- It is closely tied with the previous letter (1 Thess. 4:13-18).

If Paul is saying that "the departure" must occur first, this is a clear reference to the rapture which he previously identified with the Day of the Lord in his other letter to them.

The rapture would certainly be an objectively verifiable, definitive event; in particular for the church.

Revelation of man of lawlessness 2:3b-10

The second event that must occur before the affliction of the day of the Lord is the revelation of the man of lawlessness.

He is the central character in the Day of the Lord.

Their persecution can't be the Day of the Lord because the real persecution doesn't start until half way through the week.

He comes at the very first.

Therefore, this can't be the affliction of the Day of the Lord.

His character 2:3b

He is characterized by his rebellion against the law and by destruction, which is his destiny.

His work 2:4-5

The work of the man of lawlessness is to oppose all other gods.

He wants all worship directed to himself.

He sits in a divine temple, presenting himself as a god.

Two views concerning this temple:

Jewish temple reconstructed-

Would the Bible call a temple, reconstructed by rebellious Jews out of fellowship with their God, the "temple of God"?

This seems to occur before the restoration.

Temple of the beast-he sets himself up as god.

He could establish his own temple.

It is the temple of a god => himself.

He reigns from there as political and religious leader (Dan. 11:45)

He reigns from his own temple as political and religious leader.

His obstacle 2:6-8a

While the power of lawlessness is always present in the world, the Holy Spirit has restrained Satan's power.

He is ready to begin his program whenever the Lord permits it.

v. 6- neuter - "*that which restrains*"

v. 7- masc. - "*he who restrains*"

The Holy Spirit uses the law [or the church] to restrain sin today.

The Holy Spirit is taken "out of the way"

It doesn't ever say He leaves. He stops interfering.

It's like taking a barricade out of the middle of the road.

"Detour to Antigua => " sign

But He is omnipresent.

He can't be taken out of the world.

He is always present.

He is the agent of regeneration throughout all time periods.

He isn't taken out of the way until the church is taken out.

Therefore, the rapture comes first.

When the Spirit is taken out of the way, that is, when He ceases to block Satan's attempt to rule, then the program of lawlessness can start.

The Spirit is taken out of the way when the departure of the church occurs.

This does not mean the Spirit leaves. An omnipresent God can't leave.

His restraining ministry is removed.

His destiny 2:8b

Paul reveals the destiny of the man of sin.

He will be destroyed by Christ at the second coming. (Rev. 19)

His deception (power) 2:9-10

In the meantime, however, he will lead many astray because of the acts he will perform with his great power.

God is the source of the deluding power which convinces them to believe in him.

Danger of a "theology of signs"

JUDGMENT OF UNBELIEVERS 2:11-12

Those who have rejected the truth and who believe the lies of the man of sin will be judged.

People will be deceived by his lies because they have refused to accept the truth. Rev. 6:14-17

They refused to believe the truth.

They took pleasure in wickedness.

They have demonstrated their true allegiance by their enjoyment of wickedness.

Therefore they will be condemned.

Practical implications:

For the Thessalonians => 2:13-17

For those who have not trusted Christ—*trust Him now!*—before the great lie comes along and you are deceived by it!

PRAYER FOR THEM 2:13-17

Paul thanks God for them because they are not of those who will be condemned.

They have received the truth 2:13-14

They have been called to share in Christ's glory.

Their destiny is secure.

Their suffering is temporary.

They haven't been left behind to suffer in the Day of the Lord.

They are secure (1 Thess. 5).

They were chosen for deliverance—not for wrath.

Paul prays that God will give them strength to stand firm in the midst of this temporary affliction 2:15-17

Thanksgiving 2:13-14

Petition 2:15-17

That they may stand firm 2:15a

That they may hold to the doctrines taught 2:15b

That God may encourage them 2:16-17a

That God may strengthen them 2:17b
confirm them in every good work and word.

HIS EXHORTATIONS 3:1-15

Having instructed the church concerning the doctrinal problem, Paul turns to some practical issues and gives them specific exhortations.

CALL TO PRAYER 3:1-5

First he urges them to pray.

They need to get their minds off themselves and their problems.

Their prayer for him 3:1-2

Therefore he asks them to pray for him and his companions.

They should pray for the effectiveness of his ministry and for protection from the opposition because they too are in the conflict.

That the message spread 3:1

That they be delivered 3:2

His prayer for them 3:3-5

At the same time, Paul indicates that he will continue to pray for them.

They should desire for themselves the same things that Paul desires for them.

He does not ask that they escape the affliction.

He prays that they might be strengthened and protected from the evil one.

His concern is that they be victorious through the affliction.

Suffering causes the afflicted one to think about himself.

The desire for self-defense produces doubt and impatience.

Paul prays that they may develop love and patience.

That God strengthen them 3:3a

That God protect them from the evil one 3:3b

That they obey His commands 3:4

That they enjoy God's love and Christ's endurance 3:5

CORRECTION OF THE LAZY 3:6-15

The unemployment caused by the persecution and the misunderstanding about the day of the Lord have created a problem with the idle ones.

They have come to enjoy the family support the church has given.

Thus they have not tried to go back to work.

They will just wait for the Lord's return.

In the meantime, they are living off the good intentions of the church and becoming busybodies.

Paul instructs the church to require them to go back to work or to stop feeding them (3:6-15).

Summary command 3:6

Pauline example 3:7-9

Paul has set the example for them.

He has not taken advantage of them.

Neither should they take advantage of one another.

Those who continue to behave in this way should be disciplined.

Specific exhortations 3:10-15

Not to feed without work 3:10

To earn their food 3:11-12

To do what is right 3:13

To correct the disobedient 3:14-15

HIS PERSONAL NOTES 3:16-18

Paul concludes the letter with some personal notes.

PRAYER FOR PEACE IN AFFLICTION 3:16

His prayer for them is that in the midst of a difficult situation, filled with turmoil, they may experience God's peace.

This peace should affect internal thought as well as personal relationships.

He desires it to touch every area of their lives.

PAULINE IDENTIFICATION 3:17

Due to the confusion of doctrine caused by some who say he sent them, and perhaps letters supposedly sent by him (2:2), Paul marks the letter with his own handwriting.

They should look for this sign.

BENEDICTION 3:18