

New Testament Survey

The Book of 2 Thessalonians

I. Attestation and Authorship¹

A. External

1. The *Didache* makes possible references to 2:3-4, 8 (chapter 16) and 3:8, 10 (chapter 12).
2. Polycarp seems to refer to 3:15 in his *Epistle to the Philipians* (chapter 11).
3. Justyn Martyr refers to 2:3-4 in his *Dialogue with Trypho* (chapter 110).
4. Irenaeus first mentions 2 Thessalonians by name and ascribes it to Paul when speaking of 2:8-9 in *Against Heresies* (III.vii.2).
5. Clement of Alexandria refers to 3:1-2 in *Stromata* (V.iii).

B. Internal

1. The writer calls himself Paul two times (1:1, 3:17).
2. The vocabulary and style are definitely Pauline.
3. There is no discrepancy between 1 and 2 Thessalonians.
4. The subject of 2 Thessalonians fits into what we know of the Thessalonian church from 1 Thessalonians.

C. Critical Objections

1. Some say that 2 Thessalonians is a forgery since its subject matter closely parallels that of 1 Thessalonians.
2. Some say the views on the second coming of Christ are different in the two Epistles to the Thessalonians. Specifically:
 - a. 1 Thessalonians predicts two phases to Christ's second coming, the Rapture (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18) and the Day of the Lord (1 Thessalonians 5:1-11). 2 Thessalonians appears to confuse both (2 Thessalonians 1:7).
 - b. 2 Thessalonians talks about the man of sin (2 Thessalonians 2). 1 Thessalonians omits this.
 - c. 1 Thessalonians predicts the coming of Christ for the Church to be something wonderful without the overtones of persecution that we find in 2 Thessalonians.
3. Critical objections answered.

¹ Henry C. Thiessen, *Introduction to the New Testament*, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Co., 1987), p p. 195-196.

- a. We would expect the subject matter of 2 Thessalonians to parallel that of 1 Thessalonians since both were written to the same church and both were written within only a few months of one another.
- b. 2 Thessalonians answers the problem of some of the Thessalonian believers thinking that they had missed the Rapture and were now in the Day of the Lord. That is why Paul emphasized the nature of the Day of the Lord so much more.

II. Background and Destination

A. Written to the church at Thessalonica - 2 Thessalonians 1:1.²

1. On Paul's second missionary journey he travelled to Thessalonica after leaving Philippi. Apparently Luke was not with him (note the "we" sections of Acts) - Acts 16:39-40.
2. Paul reasoned in the Sabbath at least three times, probably more - Acts 17:2.
3. When some Jews, devout Greeks, and leading women believed the message Paul preached, the Jews stirred up a mob against Paul. Paul then leaves with Silas for Berea - Acts 17:4-10.
4. We then note that at least four groups of people formed the church at Thessalonica: Jews, devout Greeks, chief women, and a mass of Gentiles.

B. The City of Thessalonica.

1. Thessalonica was situated on the Egnatian Way, the great military and economic route between Rome and the eastern parts of the empire.
2. Thessaolonica was a prominent military and strategic center. It was one of the leading cities of Macedonia.

III. Occasion and Date

A. Paul writes 2 Thessalonians in response to what may be a forged letter confusing the Thessalonian Church on the Day of the Lord and the fact that they were already within the Day of the Lord - 2 Thessalonians 2:2.

B. Written approximately A.D.50-51 from Corinth during Paul's second missionary journey, most likely just a few months after 1 Thessalonians.

1. The state of the Thessalonian Church is nearly identical in both letters.
2. The same excitement and confusion exists regarding the Day of the Lord.
3. The same group of people are living as busybodies and not being diligent about their vocation.
4. Silas and Timothy are both still with Paul.

IV. Purpose and Plan³

² Thiessen, p. 197.

³ Thiessen, pp. 198.

- A. To clear up confusion regarding the Day of the Lord.
 - B. To further admonish the idle believers to get a job and be productive.
 - C. To clear up confusion regarding a possible forged letter or message from Paul.
- V. A Basic Outline⁴
- A. Salutation - 1:1-2.
 - B. Consolation and Doctrine
 - 1. Thanksgiving for the Thessalonians - 1:3-4.
 - 2. Encouragement in View of Christ's Return - 1:5-10.
 - 3. Prayer for the Thessalonians - 1:11-12.
 - 4. Events Preceding the Day of the Lord - 2:1-12.
 - 5. Renewed Thanksgiving and Practical Exhortation - 2:13-15.
 - 6. Renewed Prayer for the Thessalonians - 2:16-17.
 - C. Exhortation and Practice
 - 1. Request for the Prayers of the Thessalonians - 3:1-2.
 - 2. Confidence in their Progress - 3:3-5.
 - 3. Charge to Discipline the Disorderly - 3:6-12.
 - 4. Exhortations to the Loyal Members of the Church - 3:13-15.
 - D. Conclusion - 3:16-18

⁴ Thiessen, p. 198-199.

VI. Chapters To Remember

2 Thessalonians 2 The Man of Sin

2 Thessalonians 3 Get a Job!

VII. Points and Peculiarities

1. 2 Thessalonians presents a clear picture of the Day of the Lord.
2. 2 Thessalonians gives us a clear understanding of the Man of Sin, the Antichrist.

VIII. A Closer Look

A. 2 Thessalonians 1

1. Encouragement Under Persecution - 2 Thessalonians 1:3-10.
2. Paul's Prayer - 2 Thessalonians 1:11-12.

B. 2 Thessalonians 2

1. The Man of Sin - 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12.
2. The Escape of the Thessalonians - 2 Thessalonians 2:13-17.

C. 2 Thessalonians 3

1. Paul's Request for Prayer - 2 Thessalonians 3:1-5.
2. Get a Job! - 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15.