

Introduction to 2 Thessalonians

Authorship

There is substantial doubt among critical scholars that Paul was the author of this letter. The reasons for this doubt are both various and technical. Some argue that the letter is too dissimilar linguistically to 1 Thessalonians, and others that it is too similar. Some see the eschatology of the letter as reflecting a later period in Christian history than that of Paul. Some wonder why Paul would write again to the Thessalonians so soon after his first letter, and some see the second letter as reflecting a change of tone to a more distant perspective.

None of these arguments is overwhelming, and we shall proceed on the assumption that Paul wrote the letter.

Manuscript History

The earliest manuscripts date to the third century. The earliest two manuscripts are:

P30, or P. Oxy. 1598, housed in Gent, contains both the first and second epistles to the Thessalonians. The portions of 2 Thessalonians it contains are 2 Thessalonians 1:1-2. This manuscript has been paleographically dated to the third century AD.

P92, or P Narmuthis 69.39a/229a, housed in Cairo, contains copies of two letters of Paul. The portions of 2 Thessalonians it contains are 2 Thessalonians 1:4-5, 11-12. This manuscript has been dated paleographically to the late third or early fourth century AD.

Many other manuscripts have survived, but all date later than these two. Nothing after the first chapter is preserved before the fourth century.

Canon

The early attestation of 2 Thessalonians is comparable to that of 1 Thessalonians. It is listed in both the Muratorian Canon and in Marcion's *Apostolicon*, is quoted by name by Irenaeus, and was known by Ignatius, Justin Martyr and Polycarp.

Setting

This letter was written not long after the first one, probably while Paul was still in Corinth, perhaps about AD 50. It appears that, after Paul sent his first letter to the Thessalonians, someone or some group sent them a forged letter in Paul's name, making claims about the immediacy of the second coming that the Thessalonian saints found troubling. The purpose of the letter was to correct the dogma of the forged letter to the

effect that the day of the Lord had already come and that the Lord's return was therefore imminent.

Outline

- I. Salutation (1:1-2)
- II. Comfort in Affliction (1:3-12)
- III. Correction Concerning the Day of the Lord (2:1-12)
- IV. Encouragement (2:13-17)
- V. Exhortations (3:1-15)
- VI. Final Greetings (3:16-18)

Further Readings

Non-LDS Sources

Malherbe, Abraham J. *The Letters to the Thessalonians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*. Anchor Bible. New York: Doubleday, 2000.

LDS Sources

Anderson, Richard Lloyd. *Understanding Paul*. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1983.

Brandt, Edward J., J. Lewis Taylor, and Lane Johnson. "New Testament Backgrounds: Thessalonians through Hebrews." *Ensign* 6 (April 1976): 56-59.

Sperry, Sidney B. *Paul's Life and Letters*. Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1955.

The Second Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Thessalonians

Chapter 1

Salutation

¹ PAUL,¹ and Silvanus,² and Timotheus,³ unto the church of the Thessalonians⁴ in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: ² Grace unto you, and peace,⁵ from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Judgment at Christ's Coming

³ We are bound⁶ to thank God always for you, brethren,⁷ as it is meet,⁸ because that your faith groweth exceedingly,⁹ and the charity¹⁰ of every one of you all toward each other aboundeth,¹¹ ⁴ So that we ourselves glory¹² in you in the churches of God for your patience¹³ and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations¹⁴ that ye endure: ⁵ *Which is* a manifest token¹⁵ of the righteous judgment of God, that ye may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which ye also suffer: ⁶ Seeing *it is* a righteous thing with God¹⁶ to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you;¹⁷ ⁷ And to you who are

¹ IE from Paul.

² The LAT form of Silas, which derives from the ARAM form (*Sa'ila*) of the name Saul. Cf. Acts 15-17.

³ IE Timothy, one of Paul's regular missionary companions.

⁴ Thessalonica was the largest city and capital of Macedonia, along the Via Egnatia, a strategic road spanning Macedonia from east to west. At the time of Paul its population may have been as high as 200,000. The city was named for the wife of Cassandra (and half-sister of Alexander the Great).

⁵ Paul combines the normal GR (grace) and HEB (peace) greetings.

⁶ OR ought, must, referring to a duty owed.

⁷ Gender neutral: "brothers and sisters."

⁸ ἀξιῶν *axion* lit. worthy, but here used in an impersonal sense: fitting, appropriate.

⁹ OR flourish.

¹⁰ OR love.

¹¹ OR increases.

¹² OR boast, take pride in.

¹³ OR endurance.

¹⁴ OR afflictions.

¹⁵ ἐνδειγμα *endeigma* evidence.

¹⁶ IE in the eyes of God.

¹⁷ OR repay with affliction those who afflict you.

troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed¹⁸ from heaven¹⁹ with his mighty angels, ⁸ In²⁰ flaming fire taking vengeance²¹ on them that know not God,²² and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: ⁹ Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from²³ the presence²⁴ of the Lord, and from the glory of his power;²⁵ ¹⁰ When he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired²⁶ in all them that believe (because our testimony²⁷ among you was believed) in that day. 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,²⁸ and the work of faith with power: 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.

Chapter 2

The Man of Lawlessness

¹ NOW we beseech²⁹ you, brethren, by³⁰ the coming³¹ of our Lord Jesus Christ, and *by* our gathering together unto him,³² ² That ye be not soon³³ shaken in mind, or be troubled,³⁴ neither by spirit,³⁵ nor by word,³⁶ nor by letter as from us,³⁷ as that the day of Christ is at hand.³⁸ ³ Let no man deceive you by any means:³⁹ for *that day shall not come*,

¹⁸ ἀποκαλύψει *apokalupsei* revelation. This GR word is the source of ENG "apocalypse." Note that the GR construction uses a noun, which has been translated with a verb in the ENG of the KJV.

¹⁹ Alluding to the second coming.

²⁰ OR with.

²¹ OR inflicting punishment.

²² An allusion to Jer. 10:25.

²³ IE away from. The punishment is not annihilation, but separation from the presence of God.

²⁴ προσώπον *prosōpon* lit. face.

²⁵ An allusion to Isa. 2:10.

²⁶ OR marvelled at.

²⁷ μαρτύριον *marturion* witness; cf. ENG martyr.

²⁸ OR all delight in well doing.

²⁹ OR ask.

³⁰ OR regarding.

³¹ παρουσίας *parousias* is the source for ENG Parousia.

³² IE and regarding our being gathered together with him.

³³ IE so easily, so quickly.

³⁴ OR disturbed.

³⁵ Meaning a pretended, ecstatic revelation uttered by a false prophet.

³⁶ IE (spoken) message.

³⁷ Meaning allegedly from us, an allusion to a forged letter Paul's enemies had sent the saints.

³⁸ IE has come.

³⁹ IE in any way.

except there come a falling away⁴⁰ first, and that man of sin⁴¹ be revealed, the son of perdition;⁴² ⁴ Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God,⁴³ or that is worshipped; so that he as God⁴⁴ sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God.⁴⁵ ⁵ Remember ye not, that, when I was yet with you, I told you these things?⁴⁶ ⁶ And now ye know what withholdeth⁴⁷ that he might be revealed⁴⁸ in his time. ⁷ For the mystery⁴⁹ of iniquity⁵⁰ doth already work:⁵¹ only he who now letteth⁵² *will let*, until he⁵³ be taken out of the way.⁵⁴ ⁸ And then shall that Wicked⁵⁵ be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit⁵⁶ of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming:⁵⁷ ⁹ *Even him*, whose⁵⁸ coming is after the working of Satan with all power⁵⁹ and signs and lying⁶⁰ wonders,¹⁰ And with all deceivableness⁶¹ of unrighteousness in⁶² them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. ¹¹ And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion,⁶³ that they should believe a lie: ¹² That they all might be damned⁶⁴ who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness.

Chosen for Salvation

⁴⁰ ἀποστασία *apostasia* apostasy, defection, rebellion (lit. "standing away"). The word in GR has the article, which indicates that Paul's readers already knew about the coming of "the apostasy." The idea is that this promised apostasy must precede the second coming, so the day of the Lord could not possibly have come yet..

⁴¹ Key early mss. read ἀνομίας *anomias* lawlessness.

⁴² A Semitic idiom for one destined for destruction.

⁴³ IE over every being that is called "god."

⁴⁴ The words "as God" are not present in the earliest mss.

⁴⁵ This v. describes the arrogance and pretensions of a false messiah.

⁴⁶ OR I kept telling you these things (taking the imperfect tense of the verb as iterative).

⁴⁷ IE holds him back, restrains him.

⁴⁸ OR disclosed.

⁴⁹ IE hidden powers, secret workings (now or soon to be revealed).

⁵⁰ Read lawlessness (with the earliest mss.).

⁵¹ IE is already at work.

⁵² OR restrains.

⁵³ IE the one who restrains. The identify of the power or person restraining the man of lawlessness is not entirely clear.

⁵⁴ OR from the scene (lit. "midst").

⁵⁵ The adjective with the article is a substantive: lawless one.

⁵⁶ πνεῦμα *pneuma* breath, wind. Cf. such ENG words as pneumatic.

⁵⁷ OR splendor of his presence.

⁵⁸ The antecedent is the lawless one.

⁵⁹ IE miracles.

⁶⁰ IE false.

⁶¹ IE deception.

⁶² IE directed against.

⁶³ OR a force of delusion; IE a deceiving power.

⁶⁴ κριθῶσιν *krithōsin* stand trial.

¹³ But we are bound⁶⁵ to give thanks alway⁶⁶ to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning⁶⁷ chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth: ¹⁴ Whereunto he called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of⁶⁸ the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. ¹⁵ Therefore, brethren, stand fast,⁶⁹ and hold⁷⁰ the traditions⁷¹ which ye have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle.⁷² ¹⁶ Now our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God, even⁷³ our Father, which hath loved us, and hath given *us* everlasting consolation⁷⁴ and good hope through grace,¹⁷ Comfort your hearts, and stablish⁷⁵ you in every good word and work.

Chapter 3

Pray for Us

¹ FINALLY, brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may have *free* course,⁷⁶ and be glorified, even as *it is* with you: ² And that we may be delivered from unreasonable⁷⁷ and wicked men: for all *men* have not faith. ³ But the Lord is faithful, who shall stablish⁷⁸ you, and keep *you* from evil.⁷⁹ ⁴ And we have confidence in the Lord touching you, that ye both do and will do the things which we command you. ⁵ And the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God, and into the patient waiting for Christ.

Warning against Idleness

⁶ Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from⁸⁰ every brother that walketh disorderly,⁸¹ and not after the

⁶⁵ OR ought, must, referring to a duty owed.

⁶⁶ IE always.

⁶⁷ TR, followed by the KJV, reads ἀπ' ἀρχῆς *ap' archēs* from the beginning, but the original reading was probably ἀπαρχήν *aparchēn* as a first portion, firstfruit (a Jewish expression for anything set apart to God before the remainder could be used).

⁶⁸ IE so that you may possess.

⁶⁹ IE firm.

⁷⁰ IE keep, observe.

⁷¹ παραδόσεις *paradoseis* lit. things "handed down" from one group or generation to another.

⁷² IE letter.

⁷³ The word "even" does not belong in the text, which originally read simply "God the Father."

⁷⁴ OR comfort, encouragement.

⁷⁵ OR strengthen.

⁷⁶ τρέχει *trechē* lit. run; metaphoric for make rapid strides.

⁷⁷ ἀτόπων *atopōn* lit. out of place; IE improper, perverse.

⁷⁸ OR strengthen.

⁷⁹ The adjective with the article is to be taken as a substantive: the evil one (meaning Satan).

⁸⁰ IE shun, avoid.

tradition which he received of us. ⁷ For yourselves know how ye ought to follow⁸² us: for we behaved not ourselves disorderly⁸³ among you; ⁸ Neither did we eat any man's bread for nought,⁸⁴ but wrought⁸⁵ with labour and travail⁸⁶ night and day, that we might not be chargeable to⁸⁷ any of you: ⁹ Not because we have not power,⁸⁸ but to make ourselves an ensample⁸⁹ unto you to follow us. ¹⁰ For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat. ¹¹ For we hear that there are some which walk among you disorderly,⁹⁰ working not at all, but are busybodies.⁹¹ ¹² Now them that are such we command and exhort by our Lord Jesus Christ, that with quietness they work, and eat their own bread.⁹² ¹³ But ye, brethren, be not weary in well doing. ¹⁴ And if any man obey not our word by this epistle,⁹³ note that man, and have no company⁹⁴ with him, that he may be ashamed. ¹⁵ Yet count *him* not⁹⁵ as an enemy, but admonish *him* as a brother.⁹⁶

Benediction

¹⁶ Now the Lord of peace himself give you peace always by all means.⁹⁷ The Lord *be* with you all.

¹⁷ The salutation of Paul with mine own hand,⁹⁸ which is the token⁹⁹ in every epistle:¹⁰⁰ so I write. ¹⁸ The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ *be* with you all. Amen.¹⁰¹

⁸¹ IE lives an undisciplined life. (Walking is metaphorical for the way one lives one's life.) Paul here rebukes those who refused to work due to the supposed imminence of the second coming.

⁸² μιμεῖσθαι *mimeisthai* imitate, copy (cf. ENG mimic).

⁸³ IE in an undisciplined way.

⁸⁴ IE freely, without paying.

⁸⁵ OR worked.

⁸⁶ OR toil.

⁸⁷ IE a burden on.

⁸⁸ IE that right. Paul had the authority or right to receive material support, but he preferred to set a proper example by working for the necessities of life.

⁸⁹ τύπον *tupon* example (cf. ENG "type").

⁹⁰ IE undisciplined.

⁹¹ The GR involves a wordplay (μηδέν ἐργαζομένους ἀλλὰ περιεργαζομένους *mēden ergazomenous alla periergazomenous*): lit. working at nothing, but working around; IE not keeping busy but being busybodies.

⁹² OR food.

⁹³ IE letter.

⁹⁴ IE do not associate.

⁹⁵ IE do not regard him.

⁹⁶ In the sense of a fellow believer in Christ.

⁹⁷ IE in every way.

⁹⁸ Paul signed the letter, as was his practice, though most of the letter was written by an amanuensis. This guarantee of authenticity was particularly important in light of the forged letter that Paul's enemies had previously sent to the Saints at Thessalonica.

The second epistle to the Thessalonians was written from Athens.

⁹⁹ σημεῖον *sēmeion* identifying mark, sign of authenticity. This GR word comes into ENG as "sign."

¹⁰⁰ IE letter.

¹⁰¹ The word "amen" was not an original part of the letter but was added by scribes.