

Introduction to 2 Thessalonians

Where is it in the Bible?

Second Thessalonians is the fourteenth book in the New Testament and is found between 1 Thessalonians and 1 Timothy.

Who wrote it?

As in 1 Thessalonians, the first verse of this letter identifies the authors as Paul, Silvanus (Silas), and Timothy. In addition, 3:17 says that it comes from Paul's own hand. In spite of this, many scholars feel that Paul did not write 2 Thessalonians, and point to differences in its tone and its perspective on the return of Christ. They believe it was written later by an unknown author who was using 1 Thessalonians as a model.

When was it written?

Naturally, dating this letter depends on how the question of authorship is resolved. Those who consider Paul to be the author of 2 Thessalonians feel that this letter was written shortly after the first one, probably between 50 and 53; this would make it one of the oldest New Testament books, second only to 1 Thessalonians. If the author was not Paul, the letter was probably written between 80 and 115, although dating it is difficult.

What is it about?

The main purpose of the letter was to clear up confusion about the "day of the Lord", or the second coming of Christ. This is addressed in 2:1-12. The letter also offers encouragement to believers who are facing persecution to remain faithful to what they have been taught and to wait patiently for the Lord's return.

How is it structured?

- I. Salutation (1:2)
- II. Thanksgiving (1:3-4)
- III. Persecution and Punishment (1:5-12)
- IV. The Day of the Lord (2:1-12)
- V. Exhortation to Remain Faithful (2:13-3:5)
- VI. Warning Against Idleness (3:6-15)
- VII. Final Blessing and Closing (3:16-18)

What are some things to look for?

- **The Day of the Lord:** In 1 Thessalonians, Paul spoke as if the day of the Lord was imminent, but that it would be a surprise. In 2 Thessalonians, it seems that some of the people have been convinced that the day of the Lord has already arrived (2:1-2). The author explains that this is not the case and urges the Thessalonians to wait patiently.
- **Idleness:** This problem was addressed in 1 Thessalonians, but here idleness is condemned because it disrupts the community of believers. The condemnation here is sterner and is accompanied by a command: “Anyone unwilling to work should not eat” (3:10).
- **Judgment:** In 2 Thessalonians, the author says that those who are persecuting the believers will be punished when Jesus returns. Some have pointed out that the aspect of vengeance here is not seen in 1 Thessalonians (1:10 or 2:16) or other undisputed letters of Paul, and they suggest that this is evidence that Paul did not write this letter. Other have proposed that the focus here is on relief for the believers, not on punishment for unbelievers, and is in agreement with other writings of Paul.
- **The “Lawless One” and the “Restrainer”:** No one can be certain who or what these two phrases refer to, although many suggestions have been made. It is possible that the original audience for the letter understood what was meant (2:5), but this has been lost to us.