



## The Return of the Lord Jesus Christ 2 Thessalonians 1:1-2:12

### Introduction to 2 Thessalonians

In Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians, he praised and encouraged the new believers and gave them instruction concerning the day of the Lord. He explained that the day of the Lord would bring both salvation (4:16-7) and judgment (5:2-3). Joyfully, it would be a day of salvation for the Thessalonians because they had faith in Jesus Christ (1 Thessalonians 5:9). In looking ahead to that day, Paul had called the Thessalonians to live as children of the light -- in faith, hope, and love. He called them to rejoice together, pray, and give thanks in everything as they looked forward to Christ's return.

Paul was still in Corinth, after writing that first letter, when he received news that the Thessalonians were standing firm in their faith as he had encouraged them to do. Unfortunately, a combination of persecution and false teaching had caused confusion, leading them to think that the day of the Lord had already come. So Paul again sat down to write, this time to reassure them that the day of the Lord had not yet arrived. Furthermore, when Jesus returned, they would have a time of rest, joy, and glory. But for those who had not *received the love of the truth so as to be saved*, it would hold awesome and terrifying consequences (2:10). (See also 2 Thessalonians 1:6-10 and 2:8-12).

In 2 Thessalonians Paul gives great encouragement. The letter can be divided into three parts.

- Chapter 1 - The hope of Christ's return
- Chapter 2:1-12 - The timing of Christ's return
- Chapter 2:13-3:18 - How Christians are to live in the light of Christ's return.

This lesson covers the first two parts of the letter. In the notes, as in Paul's letters, *the day of the Lord*, *the day of Christ*, and *that Day* are used interchangeably. All refer to the time of Christ's return.

### Outline of 2 Thessalonians 1:1 - 2:12

- I. The Hope of Christ's Return - 2 Thessalonians 1:1-12
- II. The Time of Christ's Return - 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12

#### I. The Hope of Christ's Return - 2 Thessalonians 1:1-12

Paul's opening greeting of grace and peace is identical to that of his first letter and again Silvanus and Timothy are included with Paul in sending the letter.

#### A. A Reason for Thanksgiving - 2 Thessalonians 1:1-4

Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy were so thankful for the Thessalonians growing faith and love toward one another that they were *boasting* (*speaking proudly*, NASB) of them to other churches. Their pride arose from the knowledge that, in spite of having to endure *persecutions* and *afflictions*, the Thessalonians continued to persevere in faith. Their faith was living and growing even though they were suffering. They refused to allow circumstances to hamper their faith. In fact, the difficulties they faced were stimulating their faith! God's grace was working within them and they were persevering. Paul affirms this and encourages them to continue. How does your life exhibit perseverance in faith? How can you affirm and encourage others?

#### B. God's Righteous Judgment - 2 Thessalonians 1:5-10

The Thessalonians were not self-centered or moaning and groaning about how unfair their situation was. Their focus was not on themselves but on God and the hope of Christ's return. They had graciously received Paul's admonitions in the first letter (1 Thessalonians 5:11-19) and their response confirmed that God was working in them and sanctifying them (1 Thessalonians 5:23) for His kingdom.

##### 1. God will repay - 1:5-9

The day will come when justice will triumph. God is just. Paul assures the Thessalonians that their persecutors will one day be repaid with *tribulation* (or "affliction"). At that time, persecuted believers, and Paul includes himself among them, will be given rest.

God's judgment will bring rest to the weary and punishment to evil-doers on the day *when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels*. This is the same day Paul spoke of in 1 Thessalonians 4:15-18. Here he refers to it as the day Christ comes *to be glorified in His saints* (1:10). Christ will come personally, visibly, and in all His glory. Paul adds that there will also be *flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ*.

- a. Those who do not know and obey - verses 6, 8

The recipients of God's vengeance will be the

troublemakers, those who were persecuting the Thessalonians. John Stott writes that these verses also describe “unbelievers in general, indeed their willful rejection of both the knowledge of God and the gospel of Christ” (The Message of 1 & 2 Thessalonians).

b. The judgment - verse 9

*These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power.* The Greek actually reads “*away from*” the presence of the Lord. Paul’s emphasis is not so much on the destruction as upon the eternal separation from God. The NIV reads “*shut out*” from the presence of the Lord and the NEB says “*cut off*” from the presence of the Lord. Those who have rejected God and the gospel of Christ will spend eternity living with that choice.

2. Christ will be glorified in His saints - 1:10

In contrast to the judgment of the willful unbelievers, those who have faithfully trusted in Christ will not only have rest and see His glory, they will also share in His glory. What does it mean that Christ will be glorified in those He has saved? The meaning goes beyond merely reflecting His glory or enjoying the presence of His glory. Christ will be glorified in those He has redeemed. He will fill us, and shine through us like the filament of a light bulb, but much, much more brightly, *to be admired among all those who believe.*

Paul adds, *for our testimony among you was believed.* It seems to give him great joy that it was his presentation of the gospel message to the Thessalonians that sparked their faith and, by the power of the Holy Spirit, brought them into the kingdom of God.

Perhaps Paul had shared with them his experience on the Damascus Road (Acts 9) where Christ had appeared to him and he had been changed from a persecutor of the faith to a preacher of the gospel. He had been transferred from the darkness of unbelief into the light of Christ’s kingdom (1 Thessalonians 5:4-5; Colossians 1:13), from being one of the judged to one of the saints. What is your testimony? Who has heard the gospel message because of you? Who will be glorified in the Lord Jesus on the day of the Lord because you had the courage to share your testimony of the gospel of God?

C. Prayer - 2 Thessalonians 1:11-12.

The excitement of recalling the Thessalonians’ response to his message caused Paul to burst into prayer for them. He uses the word “*we*”, including Silvanus and Timothy. The three of them prayed for the Thessalonians *always*. Their beloved converts were always on their minds and in their hearts. They continually lifted them up to God.

Their prayer includes four requests:

1. That God would count the Thessalonians worthy of His calling.
2. That God’s power would work in them for His pleasure, for goodness, and for faith.
3. That the name of the Lord Jesus Christ would be glorified in them.
4. That they would be glorified in Christ.

They trusted that all these would be accomplished by the grace of God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

## II. The Time of Christ’s Return - 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12

There was confusion among the Thessalonian Christians about the time of *the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him*. Paul had addressed this in his first letter, but now it seems they were being exposed to false teaching that led them to believe *the day of Christ* had already arrived. Furthermore, they thought this teaching was from Paul. He addresses their confusion and gives needed correction.

### A. Confusion About Christ’s Return - 2 Thessalonians 2:1-3

Paul did not want the Thessalonians to be *shaken in mind or troubled, either by spirit or by word or by letter* that appeared to be from him. The Greek word used for “*shaken*” is the same word used of an earthquake in Acts 16:27. It is also the word that was commonly used in reference to a ship being loosed from its moorings in a heavy wind. The false teaching they had heard was troubling the Thessalonians and threatening to shake the moorings of their faith. Paul exhorts them not to be deceived, *either by a spirit* (probably referring to a special revelation), by a message delivered to them, or by a letter that was purportedly from him. He admonishes: *Let no one deceive you by any means.* Verses 5 and 6 reveal that Paul had taught clearly on this subject when he was with them. What he writes next are things they should already know. Fortunately, he repeated them so we can better understand also.

### B. Signs of Christ’s Return - 2 Thessalonians 2:3-10

Paul’s answer to the Thessalonians’ confusion explains that two developments must precede *that Day*. First the *falling away* must occur, which will precipitate the second, the revealing of the *man of sin* (or *lawless one*). Neither of these precursors had occurred, so the day of the Lord could not have come.

Referring to 2 Thessalonians 2:3-7, Dr. Leon Morris, a leading New Testament scholar of the mid-twentieth

century, stated, "This passage is probably the most obscure and difficult in the whole of the Pauline writings and the many gaps in our knowledge have given rise to extravagant speculations" (1 and 2 Thessalonians, Tyndale New Testament Commentary). To address every viewpoint pertaining to this passage is beyond the scope of these lessons. Every effort will be made to avoid conjecture while explaining as succinctly as possible Paul's references to the *falling away* and the *man of sin*.

### 1. The *falling away*- 2:3

"*The falling away*" is actually better translated as "rebellion" or "revolt". Paul uses the Greek word, "apostasia", which is generally used in the New Testament in reference to apostasy from the faith. When Christ was on earth, He warned of such a day, *And then many will be offended, will betray one another, and will hate one another. Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many. And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold* (Matthew 24:10-12). This apostasy must take place before Christ returns.

### 2. The *man of sin* or *lawless one* - 2:3-9

Closely connected with the apostasy will be the *man of sin* (*lawless one* in verse 8), also called *the son of perdition* (or *destruction*, NASB). Perdition/destruction will be his very nature and will also be his eternal fate. He will be the utter personification of wickedness. The majority of Bible scholars connect the *man of sin* with the "antichrist", a name mentioned in Scripture only by the apostle John. He wrote, *Little children, it is the last hour; and as you have heard that the Antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come* (1 John 2:18) *Who is a liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist who denies the Father and the Son* (1 John 2:22). See also 1 John 4:3 and 2 John 1:7. Similarly, Jesus taught, *false christs and false prophets will rise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect* (Matthew 24:24).

The meaning of the word "antichrist" is consistent with the description of Paul's *man of sin*. "Anti" can mean "against", "opposite of", or "in place of". "Christ" is Greek for the Hebrew "Messiah" and refers to Jesus. The man of sin fits all three definitions of the prefix "anti". He will not only be against Jesus and in opposition to Him, but will also attempt to set himself in the place of Jesus.

This kind of rebellion will not be a new thing. It has been taking place since Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden when they defied God by eating the forbidden fruit. Some of Israel's kings rebelled against God and led the people in abominable idol worship (1 Kings 12:28-

33; 16:29-33; 2 Kings 21:1-12). Kings of Babylon and Tyre attempted to set themselves up as gods (Isaiah 14:13-14; Ezekiel 28:2). Antiochus IV, called Epiphanes (meaning "God manifest"), invaded Jerusalem in 169 B.C., took military control, prohibited Jewish religious worship, and set up the worship of Zeus in the Temple. Jewish writings refer to him as "harasha" meaning "the wicked". Roman emperors living in Paul's time denied Christ and demanded to be called Lord. The Roman commander, Titus, who later became emperor, led the armies of Rome against Jerusalem in A.D. 70 with the desire to seize and dedicate the Temple to the emperor and the Roman pantheon of gods. His soldiers demolished the Temple instead.

Down through the ages there have been many who have exhibited characteristics of the man of sin (or antichrist). Nero, Hitler, and Stalin, are a few examples. All of those named above have been forerunners of the man of sin who is to come. They are merely a faint foreshadowing of the person Paul calls *the man of sin*. Paul gives a great deal of information about him.

- a. He opposes God and exalts himself as God - verse 3-4

The man of sin sets himself in opposition to God and exalts himself to be worshiped in the place of God. The statement that he *sits in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God*, expresses the opposition of evil to God. This is similar to prophecies in Daniel 7, 8, and 11. Descriptions of the beast in the Book of Revelation are also similar to Paul's man of sin (Revelation 13).

There are three views concerning the phrase, *he sits as God in the temple of God*.

1. Some see the man of sin sitting in the temple of God in a literal sense.
2. Others see the temple of God as a reference to the church.
3. Still others see the phrase as a metaphor to express the extent of the opposition.

"What matters, however, is the spiritual truth conveyed by the imagery, namely, the reality and menace of the power of evil which attempts to deny the reality and power of God" (1 and 2 Thessalonians, I. Howard Marshall).

- b. He is now restrained - verse 6-7

Paul writes that *the mystery of lawlessness is already at work*. He calls the lawlessness a *mystery* because, although already working, it is being restrained and operates only subversively and secretly. There is a *restrainer* keeping the rebelliousness from breaking out in full force and keeping the man of sin from being revealed. The *restrainer* seems to be both a principle

"*what is restraining*" (verse 6) and a person "*he who now restrains*" (verse 7).

Paul does not name the restrainer, but he does make it clear that the Thessalonians knew what he was referring to, *and now you know what is restraining*. This has not been revealed to the rest of us and in reference to the restrainer, Augustine, Bishop of Hippo, wrote in City of God (5<sup>th</sup> century AD), "I frankly confess I do not know what he means." Down through the ages, there have been many speculations as to who the restrainer might be, but God has not given enough information for anyone to know for sure. J. Sidlow Baxter writes, "Paul was withheld by the Holy Spirit from being more explicit, so that his written words here might have a far reach into the future which his spoken words to the Thessalonians perhaps did not" (Explore the Book).

- c. He (the lawless one) will be revealed - verse 8

Beginning in verse 8, Paul begins to refer to the man of sin as *the lawless one*. "He opposes all law except his own, both the law of God and of man" (The Last Things, George Eldon Ladd). Since Paul's day to the present time, the lawless one is being restrained. But before Christ returns, the restraint will be removed and secret subversion will become open rebellion. The lawless one will be revealed in all his cunning and wickedness. There will be an open manifestation of evil. However, it will not last long because the lawless one will be revealed only for the purpose of his destruction.

- d. He will be destroyed - verse 8

The Lord will *consume* him *with the breath of His mouth* and *destroy* him *with the brightness of His coming*. Paul's description reflects the symbolic language of Isaiah 11:4, *He shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of His lips He shall slay the wicked*. It is also similar to the apostle John's language describing the end of lawlessness in Revelation 19:15,21.

- e. His coming is in accord with the activity of Satan, with power, signs, and false wonders - verse 9

Satan is the one who will empower the lawless one and give him ability to perform miracles, or at least acts that appear to be miracles.

- f. His coming is in accord with *all unrighteous deception among those who perish* - verse 10

The lawless one will deceive unbelievers, those who *did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be*

*saved*. John MacArthur writes, "His whole operation will be deceptive, luring the world to worship him and be damned" (The MacArthur Bible Commentary).

### C. Those Who Perish - 2 Thessalonians 2:10-12

Those who believe the lies of the lawless one will perish. Because they did not love the truth of the gospel and humble themselves to be saved, they will perish in their pride. God will give them over to believe in delusions. In other words, those who desire to believe falsehood will be permitted to have their way. Romans Chapter 1 explains that those who refuse to recognize the truth become *futile in their thoughts*. Their hearts become foolish and dark and they commit unrighteous deeds. In their rebellion against Him, God permits them to pursue their own unrighteous desires.

Rather than believing the truth, these persons take *pleasure in unrighteousness*. They will follow in the footsteps of the lawless one, in rebellion against God. James Grant writes, "At the root of lawlessness and apostasy and rebellion is a refusal to love the truth. This refusal to love the truth results in further deception. This is a warning to all of us.... We need to be well-grounded in the gospel and in God's Word. We must love God's truth, the very Word of God, so we will not be deceived by the evil one" (1 & 2 Thessalonians, The Hope of Salvation).

### Applications

1. How well-grounded are you in the truth of God? If the lawless one were revealed today, would you be deceived by his charismatic personality and seemingly supernatural acts? Which would you love more, the truth of God or the spectacular show of power put on to deceive you?
2. Who do you know who could be described as one who is perishing, a person who has no love for the truth of God? Has this lesson opened your eyes to their plight? May God fill your heart with a burden for those people and lead you to pray frequently and earnestly for the softening of their hearts. May He give you a spirit of caring and kindness toward them and words which will draw them to the Word of God. Who will you begin to pray for today? Who will you invite to church or Bible study this week? Who needs to hear your testimony and experience God's love through you?
3. Read again Paul's prayer in 2 Thessalonians 1:11-12. Who will you pray that prayer for right now? Will you include yourself as you pray?



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## QUESTIONS

All questions are based on the New King James Version of the Bible.

### DAY ONE: Read all lesson notes and references.

1. a. In 2 Thessalonians 1, how did the apostle Paul encourage the Thessalonians?  
  
b. How could you encourage fellow Christians whose faith is being tested and shaken?
  
2. Concerning the day of the Lord:
  - a. What two things must happen before Christ returns?
  
  - b. What two kinds of people does Paul write about?
  
  - c. Which kind are you? How do you know?
  
3. Has studying 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12 led to any change in your thoughts, attitudes, or actions? If so, please share this with your group.

### DAY TWO: Read 2 Thessalonians 2:13-17.

4. a. In verses 13-15, what part did each of the following play in the salvation of the Thessalonians?  
God  
  
The Holy Spirit  
  
The apostle Paul  
  
The Lord Jesus Christ
  
- b. Applying the above answers to yourself and using your own words, what has each of these persons done for you?  
God  
  
The Holy Spirit  
  
The apostle Paul  
  
The Lord Jesus Christ
  
5. a. What did Paul call the Thessalonians to do in light of this work which had been done for them?  
  
b. What do you think Paul meant by:  
“*stand fast*”?  
  
“*hold the traditions*”?

- c. ♥(Heart Question) How will you respond to what has been done for you?

**DAY THREE: Read 2 Thessalonians 3:1-9.**

6. a. What did Paul ask the Thessalonians to pray for himself, Timothy, and Silvanus ("us" in verse 1)?
- b. What did he pray for the Thessalonians?
7. a. Of what was Paul confident?
- b. Why could he have this confidence?
8. a. What command is given "*in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ*"?
- b. What example were the Thessalonians to set?
- c. What example had Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy set?
9. The word "*disorderly*" (or "*unruly*" NASB, "*idle and disruptive*" NIV) in verses 6,7, and 11 is the Greek "ataktos" which means "out of line". It is a military term referring to insubordinate soldiers. In what ways can Christians be "ataktos" today?

**DAY FOUR: Read 2 Thessalonians 3:10-18.**

10. a. In what way had some of the Thessalonian believers been "ataktos"?
- b. What previous command had Paul personally given concerning these people?
- c. What command does he now give?
- d. How did he encourage the "*busybodies*"?
11. a. How were the disobedient to be treated?
- b. How would you apply Paul's words in Ephesians 4:15-16 to this situation?

12. a. What encouragement did Paul give the brethren?
- b. What further encouragement do you receive about this from 1 Corinthians 15:58 and Galatians 6:7-10?
13. Which words in Paul's closing benediction are most meaningful to you? Why?

**DAYS FIVE and SIX: Review 1 and 2 Thessalonians.**

In answering the following questions, please share what you received from your study of 1 and 2 Thessalonians. There are no "right" answers.

14. What do you think was Paul's greatest joy in his relationship with the Thessalonians?
15. What do you think was Paul's greatest concern for the Thessalonian believers?
16. How did Paul best encourage the Thessalonian believers?
17. What did you learn from this study that was new to you?
18. What did you learn from your study of 1 and 2 Thessalonians that has made a difference in your life?