

Overview for 2 Thessalonians

a brief overview

- **Church plant 49-50AD**

In Acts 17 we read about the formation of a church in Thessalonica during Paul's second missionary journey in circa 49-50 AD. The Bible contains two letters from Paul to the Thessalonian church written from Corinth circa 50-51 AD. The church was diverse consisting of some 'Jews, ... a large number of God-fearing Greeks and not a few prominent women (Acts 17.4).' The church was founded on Paul's reasoned teaching 'from the Scriptures, explaining and proving that the Christ had to suffer and rise from the dead. "This Jesus I am proclaiming to you is the Christ" (Acts 17.2-3).'

- **Initial opposition**

The church plant faced immediate opposition from jealous Jews. They incited civil unrest claiming that Paul was a trouble-maker who opposed the rule of Caesar (Acts 17.5-7). The jealous Jews of Thessalonica were so determined to oppose Paul's mission that they pursued him to Berea and stirred up trouble there also.



- **Why did Paul write 1 Thessalonians?**

It appears that Paul was relatively quickly separated from the Thessalonians and yet he knew a church had formed. In 1 Thessalonians Paul encourages these Christians to continue as they began. They received Christ in the midst of opposition and suffering (1 Thessalonians 1.1-10). By way of the examples of his own ministry amongst them and, the churches in Judea, Paul sets the expectation of hostility towards gospel ministry and people (1 Thessalonians 2.1-16). Paul says he has not abandoned the Thessalonians but is prevented from visiting. Such persecution is to be expected as normal. Paul is however so concerned for the Thessalonians that he sends Timothy from his mission team to

strengthen and encourage them (1 Thessalonians 2.17-3.5). Timothy's return with a good report prompts Paul to write this his first letter. Paul is encouraged by the growing love and faith of the Thessalonians and prays that they may be reunited and so mutually encouraged/strengthened (1 Thessalonians 3.6-13). Paul makes a repeated call for the Thessalonians to live lives pleasing to God (1 Thessalonians 4.1-12). Paul finishes with the beautiful teaching about the coming of the Lord, the resurrection of the dead and catching up together in the air of those who are still alive at the time of his coming. The timing of the second coming of Jesus is unpredictable so the Thessalonians are to live ready, *alert and self-controlled* (1 Thessalonians 4.13-5.11).

Paul's first letter reminds the Thessalonians that they live between the two comings of Jesus. They have responded in faith to the Gospel (good news) of the incarnation, death and resurrection of Jesus as the very word of God. They are saved but living for Jesus will be full of hostility & trials. However even as Christians persist in doing good and living to please God amidst persecution this witnesses both to the salvation of unbelievers, and, the strengthening of believers. They are to live now to please God finding encouragement in the sure knowledge of the imminent (though unpredictable) return of the Lord Jesus and being with him forever.

- **Why did Paul write 2 Thessalonians?**

Paul writes his second letter with a particular emphasis on living in the light of the future second coming of Jesus. It seems that the second letter, while still encouraging the Thessalonians to persevere in the midst of persecution, really addresses a misunderstanding of the second coming of Jesus. The misunderstanding in Thessalonica is that Jesus has in fact already returned. This possibly arises from Paul's first letter and his teaching on the imminent though unpredictable nature of the second coming of Jesus.

Paul begins his second letter with an affirmation that the Thessalonians are **growing in faith** in the midst of persecution. This demonstrates that God's judgement is right but of course the ongoing persecution is also evidence that God's judgement is not yet come (2 Thessalonians 1). If God's judgement is not yet come neither has Jesus. Paul stimulates the Thessalonians to be **growing in understanding** by stating explicitly that thinking Jesus has already come is a deception. Two things will signal the second coming of Jesus; the rebellion will occur, and, a lawless one will be revealed (2 Thessalonians 2.1-15). Because King Jesus has not yet come to consummate his kingdom's rule and reign, Paul wants the Thessalonians to be **growing in courage**. He requests prayer and himself prays for the encouragement of the Thessalonians as they continue in the mission of Jesus. (2 Thessalonians 2.16-3.5). Finally, Paul addresses the presenting problem in Thessalonica. Living as if Jesus had already returned meant some Thessalonians had become idle and busy-bodies as if there is no longer a place for earthly work. In the now but not yet tension of living in the Kingdom of Jesus, Paul instructs the Thessalonians to be **growing in love**. Being busy now is in order to not be a burden and so you can be generous. In this and in all matters Christians are to be obedient to the Apostles' teaching (2 Thessalonians 3.6-18).