

**2 THESSALONIANS 1-3 END-TIME EVENTS: MAN OF SIN; AVOIDING SLOTHFULNESS**

For a second time, in short order, Paul has to address the Thessalonian brethren. Unfortunately, some things had worsened since his first epistle. The persecutions against them had intensified and a supposed epistle from Paul or another Church authority claimed Christ's coming had already arrived. Lastly, those who had stopped working, thinking Christ's return was imminent, were becoming even more abusive. So Paul sends them this second epistle to correct the existing problems, probably written from Corinth around A.D. 50, where Acts 18:5 mentions Paul, Silvanus (or Silas) and Timothy are together for a last time.

Paul begins, "Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy, To the church of the Thessalonians in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Thes. 1:1-2). Notice Paul, as was his custom, names only God the Father and Jesus Christ (twice in the verse) but not any third person. This goes against Trinitarian teachings since it would be an insult if the Holy Spirit were a person and yet not mentioned at all! He also desires they have "grace and peace," meaning God's continual favor and help, and that they could dwell in peace, especially since the persecutions there had increased.

He goes on to say, "We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is fitting, because your faith grows exceedingly, and the love of every one of you all abounds toward each other, so that we ourselves boast of you among the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that you endure, which is manifest evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you also suffer; since it is a righteous thing with God to repay with tribulation those who trouble you, and to give you who are troubled rest with us when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in 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" (2 Thes. 1:3-8).

Paul praises them for facing their persecution with "patience" or *hupomone* in the Greek, better translated as perseverance. He also extols their brotherly love and help in this time of trial.

He reminds them of their ultimate goal, as he did in his first epistle, of being "counted worthy of the kingdom of God." He stresses the same thing in verses 10-12 about being "worthy of this calling." So salvation is not a given and there is no "eternal security" being taught here. A person *can* fall away if careless and finally deemed unworthy by God. He encourages them to persevere in the faith so their examples will glorify Christ, as God provides them the needed grace to do so. One day, he says, all wrongs will be righted when Jesus returns and just punishment will be meted out to the wicked.

Regarding the unrighteous, he states, "They shall be punished with *everlasting destruction* from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power, when He comes, in that Day, to be glorified in His saints and to be admired among all those who believe, because our testimony among you was believed" (2 Thes. 1:4-10).

Notice the fate of the unjust is "everlasting destruction." Similarly, Jesus Christ noted, "And these will go away into *everlasting punishment*, but the righteous into eternal life" (Mt. 25:46). So it does not say the destiny of the wicked is everlasting *suffering*, but rather *utter destruction*.

Paul starts the next chapter, "Now, brethren, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, we ask you, not to be soon shaken in mind or troubled, either by spirit or by word or by letter, as if from us, as though the day of Christ had come" (2 Thes. 2:1-2).

Again we see Paul expecting to be gathered in the air with the saints at Christ's return. This was, at least, his hope. He warns them of the false rumor that Christ's coming had already arrived, maybe in a spiritual way, and therefore the resurrection had already taken place. Paul said to Timothy, "Hymenaeus and Philetus are of this sort, who have strayed concerning the truth, saying that the resurrection is already past; and they overthrow the faith of some" (2 Tim. 2:17-18).

He mentions three ways the brethren could be deceived: (1) by spirit – some having a vision or a dream about this having occurred; (2) by some supposed sayings from eminent authorities in the

Church; or (3) by a fake letter either coming from Paul or other church leaders, stating these things.

This shows there was at least one counterfeit epistle of Paul circulating then, and one way he counteracted it was by personally writing the last part of his epistles, as he did in this one. He said, "The salutation of Paul *with my own hand*, which is a *sign in every epistle*; so I write" (2 Thes. 3:17).

Then, Paul proceeds to prove to them they need not be disturbed by these false teachings about Christ's coming having already occurred.

He says, "Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless *the falling away* comes first, and the man of sin [he is against God's laws] is revealed, the son of perdition, who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God. Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you these things?" (2 Thes. 2:3-5).

There are several ways to understand this first event since it's not spelled out. The Greek term is *apostasia*, from where we get the word "apostasy." In this context, it is a strongly negative word, referring to "*the rebellion*" against God's authority in the end time, and not just any falling away.

The first way this can be taken is Satan's great "rebellion" against God in the end-time which lasts 3 ½ years. Rev. 12:7-14 tells us Satan and his demons will "rebel" against God, storm the heavens and will be cast down, whereupon he will persecute the Woman (Church) for 3 ½ years.

The second way to understand this term is by the "forsaking" of truth in the end time. Christ also prophesied, "Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many. And because lawlessness will abound, *the love of many [brethren] will grow cold*. But he who *endures to the end* shall be saved" (Mt. 24:11-13). Paul also said, "Now the Spirit expressly says that *in latter times* some will *depart from the faith*, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons" (1 Tim. 4:1). So it can also mean brethren falling away from the truth--and of siding with the beast and false prophet.

Also possible is a combination of both of the above: Satan's rebellion, which begins the powerful supernatural deceit and the resulting falling away of

brethren who are not steadfast in the faith. We can't be sure yet which is the correct interpretation of this verse and will have to wait.

After this "apostasy," the next event is the rise of "the man of sin," Satan's spiritual henchman who will enact mankind's deception. In Rev. 13:11-14, it says of the false prophet, "Then I saw another beast coming up out of the earth...He performs great *signs*, so that he even makes *fire* come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men...and *deceives* those who dwell on the earth."

Notice how close this description is to what Paul then says, "The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, *signs*, and lying wonders, and with all unrighteous *deception* among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved" (2 Thes. 2:9-10).

Paul adds, "And now you know what is restraining, that he may be revealed in his own time. For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only He who now restrains will do so until He is taken out of the way" (2 Thes. 2:6-7).

Who is the one restraining these events? Paul is not clear, but it has to be a very powerful being who can be ordered to withdraw from action. In Daniel, it says about the end time, "At that time *Michael shall stand up*, the *great prince* who *stands watch over the sons of your people*; and there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation, even to that time. And at that time your people *shall be delivered*, everyone who is found written in the book." (Dan. 12:1). We see, then, Michael has been instrumental in *opposing* Satan's forces on the earth in the past and will do so in the future (Dan. 10:13, 21; Jude 1:9).

Thus, God uses His mighty angels to restrain Satan from exercising more power and doing more damage. But there will be a time when Satan will be loosed upon the world. As Rev. 12:12 says about that brief period, "Therefore rejoice, O heavens, and you who dwell in them! Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and the sea! For the *devil* has come down to you, *having great wrath*, because he knows that he has a *short time*."

The other important point in this section is most likely, it is the false prophet who "sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God" (2

Thes 2:4). The phrase “temple of God” here is the standard description of the inner sanctuary of the Temple which was once in Jerusalem.

As *Expositor's* says, “[T]his individual ‘opposes and exalts himself over everything that is called God or is worshiped.’ His direct and determined opposition to the true God will be a leading feature of the continuing apostasy...The man of lawlessness will occupy the holy precincts in order to accept and even demand worship that is due God alone. This evidently is a Jewish temple to be rebuilt in Jerusalem in the future. Dependence of these words on Daniel 9:26, 27; 11:31, 36, 37; 12:11 (cf. Matt 24:15; Mark 13:14) demands such a reference. There is no impressive evidence for understanding the Gk. *naon* (‘temple’) in a nonliteral sense. The well-known ‘abomination that causes desolation’ is sometimes regarded as a person and sometimes as an act of desecration by that person...Historically, a foreshadowing of this blasphemous intrusion happened when Antiochus Epiphanes desecrated the temple [in 168 B.C.] just before the Maccabean revolt” (note on 2 Th. 2:4).

Paul then warns, “Because they were quite without that love of the [truth] by which they might have salvation. And for this cause, God will *give them up* to the power of deceit and they will put their faith in [a lie]” (2 T. 2:10-11, BBE). So God is *permitting* all of this to occur at this particular time. Hence, the divide between the just and unjust will be “the love of the truth” which is equated here with “righteousness,” or the keeping of the commandments of God (Ps. 119:172) and having “the faith of Jesus” (Rev. 14:12).

From the context, the great “lie” the world will believe is: the “false prophet” sitting in the Temple as the incarnation of Christ in the flesh (the Antichrist) and claiming to do wonders through God instead of Satan. Only the elect, by grace, will know better (Mt. 24:22-24). *The Believer's Bible Commentary* mentions, “This description clearly identifies him as Antichrist, the one who is opposed to Christ and who sets himself up in the place of Christ.” Emphasis should be made that the marvels done by the false prophet are not fake, but real happenings, but only that they come from an unleashed Satan allowed to do all his bidding.

So Paul exhorts the brethren to hold fast to what they have learned. “Therefore, brethren, stand fast

and hold the traditions which you were taught, whether by word or our epistle (2 Thes. 2:15). These traditions and doctrines are the ones taught *by the apostles* at that time (see Acts 2:42; 16:4).

Finally, Paul addresses those brethren that had quit working and were living off other members since they thought Christ' return was imminent.

He said, “But we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly and not according to the tradition which he received from us. For you yourselves know how you ought to follow us, for we were not disorderly among you; nor did we eat anyone's bread free of charge, but worked with labor and toil night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, not because we do not have authority, but to make ourselves an example of how you should follow us. For even when we were with you, we commanded you this: If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat. For we hear that there are some who walk among you in a disorderly manner, not working at all, but are busybodies. Now those who are such we command and exhort through our Lord Jesus Christ that they work in quietness and eat their own bread. But as for you, brethren, do not grow weary in doing good. And if anyone does not obey our word in this epistle, note that person and do not keep company with him, that he may be ashamed. Yet do not count him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother” (2 Thes. 3:6-15).

Although Paul was compassionate, he insisted those that could, *should* sustain themselves. Those who had quit working because they thought Christ would soon arrive needed to go back to work and not depend on others for their upkeep. No handouts were to be given to those who stubbornly refused to go back to work. These people were not only idle, but had become “busybodies,” meddling in the affairs of others. They should instead work with “quietness” and not as excited fanatics about Christ's coming. If the persons refused, they were to be temporarily suspended, but not totally banned from fellowship, since they were to be regarded as “a brother.” The purpose was “that he be ashamed.” He is to reflect on the situation and repent so the end result will be peace. As he says, “Now may the Lord of *peace* Himself give you *peace* always in every way. The Lord be with you all” (2 Th. 3:16).