

ELIM ABERYSTWYTH, 2024

STAND FIRM

Learning from the Letters to the
Church of the Thessalonians

2 Thessalonians 1



PAUL'S SECOND MISSIONARY JOURNEY



MACEDONIA

PHILIPPI

TH

THESSALONICA

BEREA

ATHENS

CORINTH

AEGEAN SEA

CRETE

**PAUL KNEW AND LOVED
THIS GROUP OF NEW
BELIEVERS PERSONALLY**

**HE WROTE TO ENCOURAGE
AND CHALLENGE THEM TO:**

- ◎ **STAND FIRM IN THE FACE
OF PERSECUTION,
CULTURAL ANTAGONISM
AND RELIGIOUS
JEALOUSY**
- ◎ **CONTINUE SEEKING TO
LIVE WHOLLY HOLY LIVES**
- ◎ **HOLD ON TO THE HOPE
OF CHRIST'S RETURN
AND FUTURE KINGDOM**

**THE REALITY OF THESE ARE
AS TRUE FOR US TODAY AS
THEY WERE IN THE FIRST
CENTURY ANO DOMINI**

Previously...

- **1 Thess 1**

- Paul affirmed them, celebrating their turning to the one true God by the work of the Spirit
- Celebrated how their hospitality, their work (faith), patience (hope) and toil (love) had had a resounding impact
- Reminded them of the future hope in Jesus

- **1 Thess 2**

- Living and ministering to please God, not people
- Encouragement in suffering for and with Christ in the truth
- Looking to the eternal treasure of people won for Christ

Previously...

- **1 Thess 3**

- **Ensure we have the right foundations**
- **Suffering for Christ is to turn our hearts to, not from God**
- **Pursuing what God wants us to do is always for our best**

- **1 Thess 4**

- **Living to please God, not people**
- **Continue to love one another as a sign to others**
- **Our future hope - we will be with the Lord forever!**

Previously...

- **1 Thess 5**

- Christ will return like a thief in the night, but we already live in the light
- Respect your leaders, love one another, work hard, rejoice, pray and give thanks
- Don't quench the Spirit
- "The one who calls you is faithful and He will do it"

- **2 Thess 1**

- 'Boasting' of their perseverance
- God is just and can be trusted to repay evil and their persecutors
- Living worthy of God's calling

Context

- Most scholars believe 2 Thess was also written from Corinth within a few years of the first letter
- Authorship sometimes questioned but the similar themes etc. suggest it is a direct follow on from Paul (and team)
- 2 Thessalonians was written in response to some specific concerns...

“Paul wrote 2 Thessalonians (1) to reassure those terrified that the day of the Lord had already come; (2) to strengthen the Thessalonians in the face of continuing persecution; and (3) to deal with the problem of some of the church members refusing to earn their own living.”

**[WWW.BIBLES.NET/BOOK-BACKGROUND/
BACKGROUND-OF-2-THESSALONIANS/](http://WWW.BIBLES.NET/BOOK-BACKGROUND/BACKGROUND-OF-2-THESSALONIANS/)**

2 Concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to him, we ask you, brothers and sisters, 2 not to become easily unsettled or alarmed by the teaching allegedly from us—whether by a prophecy or by word of mouth or by letter—asserting that the day of the Lord has already come.

Day of The Lord

- Some level of hysteria had set in amongst a number of the believers in Thessalonica
- They had been led to understand that a new teaching had (somehow) come from Paul and co.
 - Clearly teaching contrary to what they had previously given them
- Centred around a belief that the 'parousia' (presence / coming) of Jesus had already happened...

Day of the Lord

- 'Day of the Lord' could be understood in various ways
 - Ranging from some specific display of God's power to final judgment day
- If it were understood here as the end of time, they wouldn't have needed to be told it had not arrived!
- Seems to be a theory around the second advent of Christ
 - Erroneous theories have continued to be purported - e.g. CT Russell (JW founder) & JF Rutherford (his successor) teaching of 1874 & 1914

3 Don't let anyone deceive you in any way, for that day will not come until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the man doomed to destruction. 4 He will oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshiped, so that he sets himself up in God's temple, proclaiming himself to be God.

5 Don't you remember that when I was with you I used to tell you these things? 6 And now you know what is holding him back, so that he may be revealed at the proper time. 7 For the secret power of lawlessness is already at work; but the one who now holds it back will continue to do so till he is taken out of the way.

Don't be Deceived

- We don't know what the motivation was, but it was clearly a deception
- The key argument that this had not happened yet was that the 'Man of Lawlessness' had not yet been revealed
- Who, or what, this refers to has been a matter of debate ever since!

“We don’t have that essential background information [Paul’s oral tradition] and that makes it hazardous to be confident who the Man of Sin was. There have been some very eminent theologians who held that it was the Roman emperor (the institution itself or a particular emperor). The Reformers were sure it was the Pope. Others have been equally confident it was Mohammed or one of the great leaders of world Communism.”

D. MCLEOD, A FAITH TO LIVE BY: ESSENTIAL CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE

Man of Lawlessness

- We do know this person (spirit / object / power) will oppose God, demand worship and claim deity
- This will be a final 'apostasy' though not the first attempt
 - The Temple has been subject to various attempts of false Gods (e.g. King Antiochus Epiphanes, BC169 and Emperor Gaius, AD40)
- Tom Wright describes the writer as looking ahead through the lens of today - using a familiar reference to illustrate what is to come

Already at work...

- The New Testament gives a number of descriptions of the antichrist spirit whilst also pointing toward an ultimate Antichrist
- Are we living in the days of the great apostasy?
 - Perhaps, but we are unsure
- They are certainly becoming nearer

"Before he is revealed openly, however, the lawlessness he embodies is operating secretly. His anti-social, anti-law, anti-God movement is at present largely underground. We detect its subversive influence around us today—in the atheistic stance of secular humanism, in the totalitarian tendencies of extreme left-wing and right-wing ideologies, in the materialism of the consumer society which puts things in the place of God, in those so-called 'theologies' which proclaim the death of God and the end of moral absolutes, and in the social permissiveness which cheapens the sanctity of human life, sex, marriage and family, all of which God created or instituted."

J. STOTT, AUTHENTIC CHRISTIANITY

**DON'T
FALL FOR
THE
APOSTASY,
STICK TO
WHAT THE
APOSTLES
SAY!**

antichrist

- There are a number of NT references to the last days - antichrist had already begun and continues to increase
 - Matthew 24:23 "At that time if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Messiah!' or, 'There he is!' do not believe it. 24 For false messiahs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect."
 - 1 John 2:18 "...you have heard that the antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come. This is how we know it is the last hour."

antichrist

- The key to helping us understand and recognise this comes later in 1 John
 - 2 This is how you can recognise the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, 3 but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world.
- A present spiritual reality with future implication

**DO NOT BE
DECEIVED BY
ANY MESSAGE
THAT DENIES
THE
INCARNATION
AND
LORDSHIP OF
CHRIST**

8 And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will overthrow with the breath of his mouth and destroy by the splendour of his coming. 9 The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with how Satan works. He will use all sorts of displays of power through signs and wonders that serve the lie,

10 and all the ways that wickedness deceives those who are perishing. They perish because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. 11 For this reason God sends them a powerful delusion so that they will believe the lie 12 and so that all will be condemned who have not believed the truth but have delighted in wickedness.

The Reveal Point

- The lawless one will be revealed - the deception will enthrall those who are set against The Lord
- The lawless one will be a work of the devil and will work according to his deceptive ways
- Signs and wonders that will serve the lie of the accuser and deceiver

The Real Point

- We understand the lawless one will have a 'level' of power
- But Jesus will show His ultimate authority and power - by way of the breath of His mouth!
 - The (effortless?) Word / Spirit
- The result of evil being fully unveiled will be the splendour of Jesus being revealed - the real point!

The Refuse Point

- Yet still people will refuse to trust in God and acknowledge Christ
- They will perish because they have refused to believe the truth
 - They will not just have been confused, they will have refused
 - Echoes of pharaoh's hard heart
- Not only this - they have actually delighted in wickedness - by choice

The Revelation (Apocalypse)

- God will eventually allow evil, unrighteousness and godlessness to reach fullness in order that He can bring righteous judgement establishing His Kingdom and goodness, making all things new
- God is gracious but will allow humanity to have what it wants - a world of self
- Revelation also gives us insight into this journey

**SO WHAT
ABOUT US?**

13 But we ought always to thank God for you, brothers and sisters loved by the Lord, because God chose you as firstfruits to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth.

14 He called you to this through our gospel, that you might share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The Truth

- We must understand ourselves in the same light as these first century believers
- Believe in the truth - not just a concept, religion or ideology - The Christ
- The Holy Spirit is at work in us to save and to sanctify - holiness

**SO WHAT
ARE WE TO
DO?**

15 So then, brothers and sisters, stand firm and hold fast to the teachings we passed on to you, whether by word of mouth or by letter.

16 May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and by his grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope,

17 encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good deed and word.

"These teachings are about three things in particular: the basic facts of the gospel; the central actions of the worshipping church, such as baptism and the eucharist; and the fundamental principles of Christian behaviour, particularly the mutual support he calls agape, 'love'. Hold on tight to these, he says, and you won't go far wrong. This is as true today as it was in the first century."

TOM WRIGHT, PAUL FOR EVERYONE: GALATIANS AND THESSALONIANS

Stand Firm

- We find ourselves in an antichrist world and culture in this day and age but we do not dismay
- We have His love, His grace, His eternal encouragement, His good hope, His strength
- Cling to The Truth with everything you have





**STAND
FIRM AND
HOLD ON
TIGHT!**

Respond

- Don't be fixated with all that is antichrist
- Be fixated on Christ Jesus and His Kingdom
- Give yourself fully to Christ today