

Survey of 2Thessalonians

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Introduction

1. Paul is the writer of this letter and the Thessalonians are obviously the recipients (1:1; 3:17).
2. The purpose of 2 Thessalonians was to correct wrong views regarding the coming of Christ (2:1-12); to exhort the believers against idleness while waiting on the Lord but to work diligently for a living (2:13-3:15); and to comfort them in their time of persecution (1:4-10).
3. After greetings and comfort in chapter one Paul thanks God for the Thessalonians' perseverance through their persecutions. Then he moves to a better understanding of the coming of Christ by saying that it is not immediate. Thus, they should return to their jobs and live for Christ every moment daily.

Outline

The Persecuted Christian's Comfort (1)

The Prophecy of Christ's Coming (2)

The Practice of Christian Conduct (3)

Main Points and Application

1. 2 Thess.1:3-5 is a wonderful description of Christians under persecution and affliction. What can we learn from them that will help our afflicted lives?
2. The story is true that God rights all wrongs and repays with affliction those who afflict (1:6-8). When will this occur? How do these verses debunk the idea that hell is on earth and we might be living it now?
3. How is the coming of Christ described (1:7-12; Acts 1:11)? Is it sudden and startling? Is it surprising and wonderful? How is the return of Christ different for Christians than for non-Christians? Is there any hope for the doctrine of universalism according to these verses?
4. According to 2 Thess.2:1-2 what led to the confusion about Christ's return? Satan is a master of deceit so we are encouraged not to be misled. Where is confusion about the coming of Christ likely to come from in our day?
5. The "Man of Lawlessness" (2 Thess.2:3-12). Who is this and what are our responsibilities?

We should not assume the man of lawlessness in 2Thes.2:4 is the antichrist. Mixing scripture passages together without paying close attention to the details can often lead to misinterpretation.

The antichrist is the easiest of figures to figure out. There are only four places in scripture where reference is made to antichrist (1John 2:18, 22; 4:3; 2 John 7) and they are *not* a fitting description of the man of lawlessness of 2Thessalonians 2:4. Why not?

1. **Antichrist is not an individual but a multitude** (1Jn.2:18) "many" (v.19) "they" (v.23) "whoever" (2 Jn.7) "many."
2. **Antichrist is not a person but a heresy** (1John 2:22; 4:3; 2John7).
3. **Antichrist is not primarily political but religious in nature** (1Jn.2:19; 2Jn.7).
4. **Antichrist is not consigned to John's future but was already present** (1Jn.2:18) "now"; (4:3) "already"; (2:18) "last hour."

When interpreting 2Thes.2 we have to first ask which “coming” is 2:1 referring to? Is it a distant future coming of the Lord or a first-century coming of God in judgment upon Jerusalem? How could James have told his readers to be patient *until* the coming of the Lord if the “coming” was not in their lifetime (Ja.5:8)? **The “coming” first-century judgment of the Lord upon Jerusalem is a clear New Testament doctrine** (Matt.24:30-34; 16:28; 1 Cor.10:11; Phil.4:5; Heb.9:26; 10:25; 1 Pet.4:7; 1 John 2:18). **The time indicators in 2 Thessalonians 2 indicate a first-century fulfillment:** “has come” (2:2) indicates the Thessalonians could have been easily persuaded to believe the judgment had already happened—it was not in their mind to believe the judgment was in the distant future; “now” (2:6) and “already” (2:7) indicate first-century activity. Also, the destruction described does not require the physical presence of Christ (c.f. 2:8 with Isa.11:4).

There are those who say “our gathering together to him” (2:1) refers to the future rapture of the church to meet Christ in the air. Notice there is no mention of being “in the air” with Christ. The only other place the word Paul uses here for “gathering” is in Hebrews 10:25 and there translated as an assembly of Christians on earth. Paul also does not say, “Now with regard to what I previously wrote to you about being caught up together in the clouds to meet the Lord” (cf.1Thes.4:16-17). In other words there is nothing in the immediate context to draw us to rapture theology, which would have to be assumed, it is not apparent in the text.

The “man of lawlessness” was clearly a contemporary of the Thessalonians and not a future figure from the context. The mystery of his lawlessness was “already at work” (2:7). The Thessalonians knew what was “now” restraining him (2:6). He was being “restrained” in their day not in some future day. So even if we never identify correctly the man of lawlessness, what we do know from the Bible is that he appeared and disappeared in the first century. Since he “took his seat in the temple of God” (2:4) and since this temple was destroyed in 70AD, then he came and went prior to 70AD. There is more to talk about but this brief account hopefully gets us looking at the texts of scripture instead of at the assumptions of many false and misleading theories.

The bottom line is this: 2 Thessalonians 2 does not appear to be about a future rapture of the church, world-wide antichrist figure, apostasy and second coming of Christ to the earth to reign for a thousand years. Far too much has to be assumed to come to these conclusions. We can be certain that the Thessalonians had been disturbed by a false message (2:2) and that Paul writes to comfort them that the day of the Lord, that is the destruction of Jerusalem had not yet occurred. Jerusalem was still standing and so was the temple and so there was still time to take care of their loved ones and their fellow Christians. This was the issue, so be confident that our God will make provisions for his own.

6. What can we learn about prayer and life as Christians from 2 Thes.3:1-5?

7. The Thessalonians are known for their love (1:3) but then they are told to not associate with certain brethren (3:6-15). Who are these brethren and where do we see their kind today? Should any of us depend upon welfare as a constant means of survival? What is the place of personal discipline in the Christian life?