



2 Thessalonians - Chapter One

Summary of Chapter One

After his introduction (vv.1-2), Paul begins this epistle with an account of his high esteem for these Thessalonians (vv.3-4). He then comforts them under their afflictions and persecutions (vv.5-10), telling them what his prayers were to God for them (vv.11-12).

I. 2 Thessalonians 1:1-2 - Salutation

Paul's opening here is very similar to 1 Thessalonians 1:1, stating that the letter was also from Silas and Timothy. The fact that all three missionaries are still together suggests that 2 Thessalonians was written shortly after 1 Thessalonians and that it was also sent from Corinth.

¹ Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy,

To the church of the Thessalonians in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ:

2 Thessalonians 1:1

Paul makes no mention of his apostolic status, perhaps because there were no false teachers challenging it within the Thessalonian church. Silvanus and Timothy were co-workers with Paul during his second missionary journey.

Silvanus, or Silas, was a Judæan Christian: <<*Then the apostles and the elders, with the consent of the whole church, decided to choose men from among their members and to send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas. They sent Judas called Barsabbas, and Silas, leaders among the brothers*>> (Acts 15:22), who had joined Paul after he separated from Barnabas: <<*The disagreement became so sharp that they parted company; Barnabas took Mark with him and sailed away to Cyprus. But Paul chose Silas and set out, the believers commending him to the grace of the Lord*>> (Acts 15:39-40).

Timothy, of Lystra in southern Galatia, was the son of a Jewish mother and Greek father and joined the ministry team when Paul passed through his hometown

during the early stages of his second missionary journey: <<Paul went on also to Derbe and to Lystra, where there was a disciple named Timothy, the son of a Jewish woman who was a believer; but his father was a Greek. He was well spoken of by the believers in Lystra and Iconium. Paul wanted Timothy to accompany him; and he took him and had him circumcised because of the Jews who were in those places, for they all knew that his father was a Greek>> (Acts 16:1-3).

Timothy had returned from a visit to the church of the Thessalonians shortly before Paul had written the first letter and his report was Paul's major source of information as he writes: <<But Timothy has just now come to us from you, and has brought us the good news of your faith and love. He has told us also that you always remember us kindly and long to see us – just as we long to see you>> (1 Thessalonians 3:6). While Silas and Timothy are included as co-senders, Paul is clearly the main author. The word translated church was a common term that is frequently used for any gathering or assembly.

In God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Believers enjoy a mysterious union with both the Father and the Son, and hence are supremely secure and safe from spiritual harm.

² Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

2 Thessalonians 1:2

Grace to you and peace. This is a typical Pauline blessing appearing in the introductions to all of his letters. Grace means God's unmerited favour; that is, the things received that are undeserved. This can be compared to mercy, which is when God does not apply the punishment that is deserved. Peace is not just the absence of conflict but echoes the OT concept of *shalom*, Hebrew for so much more than peace, where a person's life with God and with everything else is in ordered harmony, both physically and spiritually, and 'all is well' in their walk with God. This same peace cannot be known apart from God.

Peace was the benediction given by the priests in the OT era and grace was added, although it has always existed, as they sought peace with God, peace in their own conscience, peace with all whom they meet. All these are found only in grace, and that grace is of God. It comes from God our Father, who gives all good things, through the mediator, the Lord Jesus Christ, the only means of receiving grace and peace in believers' lives.

II. 2 Thessalonians 1:3-12 - Thanksgiving and Comfort for the Persecuted Thessalonians

In Greek, vv.3-10 are one long, unwieldy sentence containing Paul's gratitude and encouragement.

II.a 2 Thessalonians 1:3-4 - Thanksgiving

Paul gives thanks for the faith and love of the Thessalonians, even while they are suffering persecution.

³ We must always give thanks to God for you, brothers and sisters, as is right, because your faith is growing abundantly, and the love of every one of you for one another is increasing.

2 Thessalonians 1:3

We must, as is right. Paul is reassuring the Thessalonians that his giving thanks to God for them is both legitimate and necessary in the face of their concern caused by misunderstanding the Lord's return (2:1-2). Specifically he gives thanks for their increasing faith and love: <<*But Timothy has just now come to us from you, and has brought us the good news of your faith and love. He has told us also that you always remember us kindly and long to see us – just as we long to see you*>> (1 Thessalonians 3:6).

Paul recognises the free gift of God's grace and gives thanks for it as is only proper. In this case the gift is the faithful Thessalonian church and Paul emphasises not only that he is thanking God for them, but that it is utterly right and proper for him to do so. Gratitude follows grace, and it prepares the heart for even more grace.

Hope is not mentioned here as it was in 1 Thessalonians 1:3 and 5:8, which may suggest that the Thessalonians were in need of it. The fact that their love for one another is increasing abundantly is an apparent answer to Paul's prayer in 1 Thessalonians 3:12.

⁴ Therefore we ourselves boast of you among the churches of God for your steadfastness and faith during all your persecutions and the afflictions that you are enduring.

2 Thessalonians 1:4

The Thessalonians are so highly thought of that Paul and his co-workers boast about them to other churches of God concerning their steadfastness and faith in the context of unrelenting and severe persecutions and afflictions.

Boasting here is rather different from bragging. Paul is not trying to tell people what a great church planter he is. Rather, he regards the Thessalonian church as evidence that he is a true apostle of Christ and the Gospel he is proclaiming is not just a story of another god to add to the list of so many that were bandied about in the region at the time. His boast is that the Gospel of Jesus as the Messiah is authentic, powerful and truly life changing for those who accept it and turn to Jesus for their own eternal salvation.

II.b 2 Thessalonians 1:5-12 - The Judgement at Christ's Coming

Paul informs the church that the wicked will be punished and the righteous vindicated when Jesus does return. Paul's prayer for the Thessalonians is that God will make them worthy of their calling, so that Jesus may be glorified in them.

⁵ This is evidence of the righteous judgement of God, and is intended to make you worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are also suffering.

2 Thessalonians 1:5

The Thessalonians' endurance and faith under persecution constitute evidence of the righteous judgment of God. Since God is granting them the grace to endure, he is clearly on their side and is working to make them worthy for entrance into the kingdom of God. This is confirmed by: <<*Only, live your life in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that, whether I come and see you or am absent and hear about you, I will know that you are standing firm in one spirit, striving side by side with one mind for the faith of the gospel, and are in no way intimidated by your opponents. For them this is evidence of their destruction, but of your salvation. And this is God's doing*>> (Philippians 1:27-28), where the Philippian Christians' fearless perseverance in persecution is a proof that they will be saved and their enemies destroyed when Jesus returns.

For which you are also suffering. Paul confirms that their suffering is for God's Kingdom, the most worthy of all causes.

⁶ For it is indeed just of God to repay with affliction those who afflict you, ⁷ and to give relief to the afflicted as well as to us, when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels ⁸ in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. ⁹ These will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, separated from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might, ¹⁰ when he comes to be glorified by his saints and to be marvelled at on that day among all who have believed, because our testimony to you was believed.

2 Thessalonians 1:6-10

For it is indeed just of God to repay with affliction those who afflict you. No one can doubt the fairness of God's judgment when he dispenses justice according to *lex talionis*, the principle of an eye for an eye: those now afflicting, Greek *thlibō*, the Thessalonian Christians will be afflicted, Greek *thlipsis*, and the afflicted believers will get relief at the Second Coming: <<*And will not God grant justice to his chosen ones who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long in helping them? I tell you, he will quickly grant justice to them. And yet, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?*>> (Luke 18:7-8).

God's righteous judgement will at the end come to the rescue of those who have been loyal to God and the Gospel, and have therefore been persecuted by the world that demands allegiance to its own power and its own gods. God, in his justice, will repay those who, out of allegiance to idols and their dehumanising ways of life, have used violence against or have verbally abused his people.

To give relief to the afflicted. When Jesus returns all persecution will cease.

As well as to us. The Thessalonians are not alone with respect to their suffering for Christ or their destiny when Jesus returns.

The just judgment of God comes in fullness at the Second Coming, when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven, refer also to 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17. Jesus is called 'Lord', which identifies him as Yahweh who executes final judgment. Refer to Isaiah Chapters 64 and 66, as well as the Key Themes in the Introduction to Mark.

The idea of a coming judgement when all the wrongs would be righted and evil would receive its just deserts was commonplace among the Jews of Paul's day. In this Jewish thought it was often the Messiah himself who would be the agent of God's judgement against the wicked. Paul, knowing Jesus to be the Messiah, saw him as the one through whom this righting of old wrongs would finally be achieved: *<<While God has overlooked the times of human ignorance, now he commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will have the world judged in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed, and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead>> (Acts 17:30-31), and: <<They show that what the law requires is written on their hearts, to which their own conscience also bears witness; and their conflicting thoughts will accuse or perhaps excuse them on the day when, according to my gospel, God, through Jesus Christ, will judge the secret thoughts of all>> (Romans 2:15-16).*

With his mighty angels. It was always known that the Messiah would come with a powerful heavenly host: *<<It was also about these that Enoch, in the seventh generation from Adam, prophesied, saying, 'See, the Lord is coming with tens of thousands of his holy ones>> (Jude 14).*

In flaming fire. Jesus the judge will be awesome and devastating, and he will instil fear in the hearts of unbelievers: *<<For the Lord will come in fire, and his chariots like the whirlwind, to pay back his anger in fury, and his rebuke in flames of fire. For by fire will the Lord execute judgement, and by his sword, on all flesh; and those slain by the Lord shall be many>> (Isaiah 66:15-16), and: <<As I watched, thrones were set in place, and an Ancient One took his throne; his clothing was white as snow, and the hair of his head like pure wool; his throne was fiery flames, and its wheels were burning fire. A stream of fire issued and flowed out from his presence. A thousand thousand served him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood attending him. The court sat in judgement, and the books were opened>> (Daniel 7:9-10).*

Inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. Many scholars agree that vengeance is not a good translation for there is a key difference between those who seek revenge and those who seek justice. Paul is not comparing God to a petty or arbitrary tyrant, who throws people into jail or worse simply because they chose the wrong side. Paul knew God as the living and loving creator of all things, who must either judge the world justly or stand accused of injustice, of letting wickedness triumph. God, in his infinite love, truth and mercy, revealed himself in the person of Jesus. God, as he did to the Egyptians and the Babylonians, has given ample warning to those

who resist his call, those referred to as not knowing God or obeying his Gospel, yet offers free eternal salvation to all those who answer the call faithfully.

When Jesus comes again, unbelievers will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, a ruinous and unending judgment of separation from Jesus. The NT is against the idea of the final annihilation of unbelievers: <<***And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life***>> (Matthew 25:46), and: <<***Then another angel, a third, followed them, crying with a loud voice, 'Those who worship the beast and its image, and receive a mark on their foreheads or on their hands, they will also drink the wine of God's wrath, poured unmixed into the cup of his anger, and they will be tormented with fire and sulphur in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment goes up for ever and ever. There is no rest day or night for those who worship the beast and its image and for anyone who receives the mark of its name'***>> (Revelation 14:9-11).

Separated from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might was a punishment that befell Israel in their continued apostasy, which resulted in the Northern Tribes being taken into exile by the Assyrians: <<***Therefore the Lord was very angry with Israel and removed them out of his sight; none was left but the tribe of Judah alone***>> (2 Kings 17:18). Those who reject the Gospel will be eternally exiled from the presence of God, tormented forever.

When he comes. The punishment of unbelievers and the reward of believers both occur on the Day of the Lord, i.e. on that day, when Jesus comes to save his people. Confusion regarding the timing of the Day of the Lord is a major problem in Thessalonica (2:2). Paul's description of the day in vv.7b-10 would have helped to alleviate the crisis. Jesus will at that time be glorified by his saints, that is, his glory will be seen in them: <<***if, in fact, we suffer with him so that we may also be glorified with him. I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us***>> (Romans 8:17b-18).

Saints are literally 'holy ones', the plural of Greek *hagios*. Believers will be fully and finally transformed so that they are holy and blameless at the Second Coming, refer to 1 Thessalonians 3:13 and 5:23-24. In addition, Jesus will be marvelled at among all who have believed.

Paul assumes that the Thessalonian Christians are included in this group, so he writes because our testimony to you was believed. To proclaim the Gospel is to bear testimony to the saving act of God in Christ.

¹¹ To this end we always pray for you, asking that our God will make you worthy of his call and will fulfil by his power every good resolve and work of faith, ¹² so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

2 Thessalonians 1:11-12

To this end, that is, in view of vv.5-10.

Our God. Paul unites himself with the Thessalonians with respect to God.

Make you worthy. Having declared that the Thessalonian Christians will be considered worthy, Greek *kataxiōō*, of the Kingdom when Jesus the judge comes (v.5), Paul's prayer for them is that they may even now be made worthy, Greek *axiōō*, of this calling: <<*As you know, we dealt with each one of you like a father with his children, urging and encouraging you and pleading that you should lead a life worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory*>> (1 Thessalonians 2:11-12).

Every good resolve is a God-imparted resolution to do good. When the day comes they must not appear as people who began to believe but never got round to working out what it might mean in practice.

Work of faith refers to work that is inspired by faith in God through Jesus. Believers are required to live up to their initial call and allow the saving lordship of Jesus to have its way in their lives.

So that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him. Just as the Son glorifies the Father, so too the Father glorifies the Son: <<*I glorified you on earth by finishing the work that you gave me to do. So now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had in your presence before the world existed*>> (John 17:4-5), and since believers are united to Christ, they will be glorified in him: <<*The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me*>> (John 17:22-23).

According to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ. The glorification of Christ's name in the Thessalonians occurs when they exalt him as Lord in their daily lives. This glorifying of Jesus' name requires focused and concentrated Christian moral effort, but underneath that as well is the mystery of God's grace.