

2 Thessalonians

Introduction and Background

1. Title

1.1 *Pros Thessalonikeis B* - “*Second to the Thessalonians*”

1.2 Thessalonica (named by Philip of Macedon in honor of his wife, the half-sister of Alexander the Great) around 315BC.

1.3 Thessalonica was the capital of the Roman province of Macedonia

1.4 It was located at the northernmost point of the Thermaic Gulf (warm mineral springs) east of the Axios River

1.5 This was along the Via Egnatia between Rome and the eastern provinces

1.6 It was the chief seaport for Macedonia and an important economic center due to heavy traffic

1.7 It was near Mount Olympus, the so-called home of the gods.

1.8 Today the city is known by the shortened name Salonika.

2. Authorship

2.1 Paul

2.1.1 Internal Evidence

2.1.1.1 1 Thess 1:1

2.1.1.2 1 Thess 3:17

2.1.2 External Evidence

2.1.2.1 Marcion's Canon (Always be leery of Marcion. He was a heretic regarding the Trinity and his theological anti-Semitism led him to reject the entire OT and any NT book that he considered Judaized).

2.1.2.2 Muratorian Canon “since the blessed (48) apostle Paul himself, following the example of his predecessor (49-50) John, writes by name to only seven churches in the following sequence: To the Corinthians (51) first, to the Ephesians second, to the Philippians third, (52) to the Colossians fourth, to the Galatians fifth, (53) to the Thessalonians sixth, to the Romans (54-5) seventh. It is true that he writes once more to the Corinthians and to the Thessalonians for the sake of admonition...”

2.1.2.3 Irenaeus

2.1.2.4 Ignatius

2.1.2.5 Justin Martyr

2.1.2.6 Polycarp

2.1.3 Arguments Against and Replies

2.1.3.1 Eschatology: 2 Thessalonians seems less imminent than 1 Thessalonians. Certain signs seem to precede the Lord's return here while none did in 1 Thessalonians. Reply: the same anticipation is found in 2 Thessalonians (cf 1:7;

2:1). It is simply less emphasized due to a different focus on calming fears that they were in the day of the Lord (2:2).

2.1.3.2 Linguistics: Style deviates too much from Paul's normal style. Reply: Three chapters is not sufficient to show significant linguistic differences. Some think 2 Thessalonians is too similar linguistically to 1 Thessalonians. The cryptic nature of the letter due to the false teachers who had crept in was necessary to shield the message from them.

2.1.3.3 Tone: 2 Thessalonians is more formal in tone than 1 Thessalonians. Reply: The situation had changed. Paul wrote 1 Thessalonians because he was encouraged by the Thessalonians. Paul wrote 2 Thessalonians because he was shocked they had been quickly shaken.

2.1.3.4 OT Allusions: 2 Thessalonians has several while 1 Thessalonians has none. Reply: Paul could refer to these now that they had grown spiritually.

2.1.3.5 Two Letters: Why would Paul write two letters so similar? Reply: The situation had changed. They needed encouragement in 1 Thessalonians. They needed doctrinal clarification in 2 Thessalonians.

3. Date

3.1 Soon after 1 Thessalonians indicated by Paul's urgency (2 Thess 2:2).

3.2 From Corinth a few months after 1 Thessalonians.

3.3 A date of AD51 seems most likely.

4. Occasion

4.1 From Corinth Paul must have sent messengers occasionally to check up on the Thessalonians. These messengers would need to be unknown to the Thessalonians in order to protect them from a further uprising of the Jews who had been jealous of his success. When the Jews realized Paul's covert method they forged a letter or message as if from Paul that included an alternate eschatology to the effect that the day of the Lord had come. Paul quickly wrote this letter by way of an amanuensis, but began to write the greeting with his own hand to distinguish his actual letters from forgeries.

5. Purpose(s) of Writing

5.1 The primary purpose was to correct the false teaching about the day of the Lord.

5.2 A secondary purpose was to encourage them to continue in the faith.

5.3 Another secondary purpose was to rebuke them from living an unruly life and not working.

6. Theme(s)

6.1 The theme is the day of the Lord

6.2 A sub-theme is the importance of correcting doctrinal error

7. Argument

7.1 The Thessalonians faith, love and perseverance were growing in the midst of persecution. Relief from persecution will come when the Lord Jesus Christ returns in judgment. However, they were shaken by the forger's claim that they had missed the rapture and were already in the day of the Lord. Paul explained that before the day of the Lord can come the apostasy must come first, the restrainer removed, and the revealing of the man of lawlessness. The explanation was something they had already been taught, but now in a cryptic way that could evade the forger's attempts to dislodge their composure.

The doctrinal error that they were in the day of the Lord led to some abuses that Paul corrected. Some were living an unruly and lazy life, not following their example of discipline and working day and night to support themselves, as if the kingdom was at hand. Paul exhorts them to follow their example. He concluded with a greeting in his own hand-writing so the Thessalonians would not be beguiled by forged letters or messages as if from Paul.

8. Outline

8.1 Salutation (1:1-2)

8.2 Situational: Persecution Now, Judgment Later (1:3-12)

8.3 Doctrinal: The Departure First, Day of the LORD After (2:1-12)

8.4 Practical: Living in Light of the Departure (2:13-3:15)

8.5 Benediction (3:16-18)

9. Uniquenesses

9.1 The first letter to contain a greeting in Paul's own handwriting

9.2 The most explicit development of the OT day of the Lord doctrine in the NT.

9.3 Possibly contains the most definitive verse on the pre-trib rapture in the NT.

9.4 Ties eschatological details from Daniel, Matthew, and Revelation together into a mini-apocalypse.

9.5 Shows that eschatology is important for new believers.

10. Controversial Passages

10.1 2 Thess 2:1 What is the relationship between the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him?

10.2 2 Thess 2:3 What is the apostasy?

10.3 2 Thess 2:13-14 To what does the salvation refer?

11. Keys to 2 Thessalonians

11.1 Key Word: Day of the Lord

11.2 Key Verse(s): 2 Thess 2:3-5 “Let no one in any way deceive you, for *it will not come* unless the apostasy comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, who opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as being God. Do you not remember that while I was still with you, I was telling you these things?

2 Thess 2:13-14 “But we should always give thanks to God for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth. It was for this He called you through our gospel, that you may gain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

11.3 Key Idea: The departure must come before the day of the Lord.