

NT Survey – 1st and 2nd Thessalonians
Valley Bible Church Adult Sunday School
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Introduction

The two letters of 1st and 2nd Thessalonians are addressed to the church in the city of Thessalonica, the capital of Macedonia. The author of the two books is Paul. The books were written during Paul's stay at Corinth during the Second Missionary Journey (AD 51-52).

Date	Event
50-52	Second Missionary Journey (Acts 15:36-18:22)
50	Dispute between Barnabas and Paul over Mark; Paul chooses Silas (Acts 15:36-40)
50	<i>Timothy</i> joins Paul and Silas at Lystra (Acts 16:1-3)
50	Paul's Macedonian call at Troas (Acts 16:6-10)
50	Paul's ministry at Philippi (Acts 16:11-40), Thessalonica (Acts 17:1-9), Berea (Acts 17:10-15), Athens (Acts 17:16-34), and Corinth (Acts 18:1-17)
~51	<i>1 Thessalonians written from Corinth</i>
~52	<i>2 Thessalonians written from Corinth</i>
53	Paul's journey to Antioch; stop at Ephesus (Acts 18:18-22)

Acts chapters 16-18 describe this portion of Paul's second missionary journey as he traveled the 100 miles from Philippi to Thessalonica in AD 50. Paul, Timothy, and Silas arrived in Thessalonica and for three Sabbaths reasoned with the Jews from the Scriptures giving evidence that Jesus is the Messiah. Some of the male Jews were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, along with a large number of the God-fearing Greeks and a number of the leading women. They had been in Thessalonica for as little as three weeks when, while staying at the house of Jason, the Jews formed a mob and attacked the house and dragged Paul before the city authorities.

Upon being released, the brethren sent the missionaries away by night to Berea. The Bereans received the word with great eagerness examining the Scriptures daily to see whether what Paul was saying was so. The Thessalonians went to Berea and agitated and stirred up the crowds against Paul. Paul was sent away, but Silas and Timothy remained with Timothy going back to Thessalonica (1 Thess 3:1-2). The brethren escorted Paul to Athens where Paul commanded that Silas and Timothy were to come to him as soon as possible. Paul moved on to Athens and eventually made his way to Corinth where he was joined by Silas and Timothy.

Paul wrote his first letter to the church at Thessalonica based on Timothy's report after arriving in Corinth. Timothy presented a church full of faith and love that stood fast under persecution. On the other hand, he reported criticism of Paul, problems with sexual immorality and idleness, confusion about the return of Jesus, and tensions in the fellowship.

His second letter was written to explain some questions arising from his first letter.

Outline of First Thessalonians

- I. Greeting and Thanksgiving (1:1-10)
- II. Defense of Paul's Absence and Actions (2:1-3:13)
- III. Instructions (4:1-5:22)
- IV. Concluding Prayer, Greetings and Benediction (5:23-28)

Summary

Greeting and Thanksgiving (1:1-10)

1:1 – Greeting – Paul begins with a standard greeting. He does not have to identify himself as an apostle by the will of God; they know who he is and what God has made him. Much of this letter is very personal and relates primarily to Paul's ministry and the Thessalonian church's response. He sends the letter from himself, and Silas, and Timothy. The three ministered in Thessalonica before being run out of town.

1:2-10 – Thanksgiving – Paul has nothing but good to say about the Thessalonian believers. He gives thanks to God always for them and prays for them.

1. They were mature(ing) as seen in their work of faith, labor of love, and steadfastness of hope. They were fruitful; their lives showed tangibly that they were “in Jesus”. (v3)
2. They were beloved by God; chosen by Him to be His children. (v4)
3. God’s choice is demonstrated by them full conviction of the Gospel and changed lives in the power of the Holy Spirit. (v5)
4. They were disciples of Jesus Christ; imitating Paul and the Lord; demonstrating their discipleship by receiving the word in much tribulation and joy. They then become examples to other believers throughout their region. (v6-7)
5. They were witnesses, who sounded forth the Word of God spreading their testimony that they had, "turned from idols to serve a living and true God" (v7-10).

❖ **Are these things true of me?**

Defense of Paul’s Absence and Actions (2:1-3:13)

There appears to have been questions concerning the methods and motives of Paul and his team’s ministry to the Thessalonians. So Paul spends time recapping his relationship

2:1-12 – The Gospel Delivered – Even though Paul, Timothy, and Silas had suffered great persecution in Philippi, they did not hold back in proclaiming "the gospel of God amid much opposition" in Thessalonica because they had boldness in God. Their preaching of the gospel did not come from error or impurity or deceit. They were not trying to please men. The Thessalonians received their message and approval from God.

❖ **Am I bold? Am I pleasing God or man?**

Paul and his team did not use flattering speech nor were they greedy, and they did not seek glory from men, even though they were apostles. They proved to be gentle among the Thessalonians, as a nursing mother tenderly cares for her own children. Paul had a great fond affection for the Thessalonians; He was well-pleased to impart to them not only the gospel of God but also his own life, because they had become very dear to him.

❖ **Do I try to use worldly means to minister God’s powerful word?**

The missionary team endured labor and hardship and behaved devoutly and uprightly and blamelessly toward the Thessalonians. They exhorted and encouraged and implored each one of them as a father would his own children, to walk in a manner worthy of God who had saved them.

❖ **Do I behave devoutly and uprightly and blamelessly?**

2:13-16 – The Gospel Received – The genuine condition of the Thessalonians were vindication of Paul’s ministry. They received the gospel as the word of God. The proof of their salvation was the word’s work in them.

❖ **Do I receive God’s word as His love letter to me?**

2:17-3:5 – Paul’s Concern – Paul had desired to return to Thessalonica, but God allowed Satan to hinder him. He was so concerned for the Thessalonians that he sent Timothy back to Thessalonica to strengthen and encourage them as to their faith. Timothy was his brother and God’s fellow worker in the gospel of Christ. Paul did not want the Thessalonians to be disturbed by their afflictions so he sent Timothy to find out about their faith, for fear that the tempter might have tempted them.

3:6-3:13 – Paul’s Joy – Timothy had brought Paul news of their faith and love, and that they always thought kindly of Paul and his team, longing to see them. Paul rejoiced that their faith was persevering and they were standing firm.

Paul’s prayer for his spiritual children:

¹¹Now may our God and Father Himself and Jesus our Lord direct our way to you; ¹²and may the Lord cause you to increase and abound in love for one another, and for all people, just as we also *do* for you; ¹³so that He may establish your hearts without blame in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all His saints.

❖ **Is this my prayer for my loved ones?**

Instructions (4:1-5:22)

After rehearsing their past relationship verifying their salvation and His service, spiritual father Paul turns to several issues of doctrine and practice.

4:1-8 – Sexual Purity – God’s word gives us instruction on how we should walk and please God. The Thessalonians were pleasing God, but Paul exhorts them to “excel still more”. Paul had give them apostolic commands – the commands of God.

❖ **Do I coast?**

Pagan culture looked on sexual immorality with indifference or tolerance. This would have been an area of struggle with the Thessalonians believers. God’s will for them is their sanctification – that they abstain from sexual immorality. “Abstain” goes beyond physical to the thought life (Matt 5:28) as well as corporate repulsion of immorality (Eph 5:3).

²⁸but I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart. Matt 5:28

³But immorality or any impurity or greed must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints; Eph 5:3

❖ **Is there immorality or impurity or greed named in my life?**

Paul gives principles for maintaining sexual purity:

1. Each believer should control their own body; the body should not control the believer.

⁴that each of you know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor,

2. The believer should not act like unbelievers

⁵not in lustful passion, like the Gentiles who do not know God;

3. The believer should not take advantage of others

⁶and that no man transgress and defraud his brother in the matter because the Lord is *the* avenger in all these things, just as we also told you before and solemnly warned *you*.

4. The believer should remember their purpose

⁷For God has not called us for the purpose of impurity, but in sanctification.

5. The believer must remain Spirit-filled

⁸So, he who rejects *this* is not rejecting man but the God who gives His Holy Spirit to you.

❖ **Am I striving to be sexually pure?**

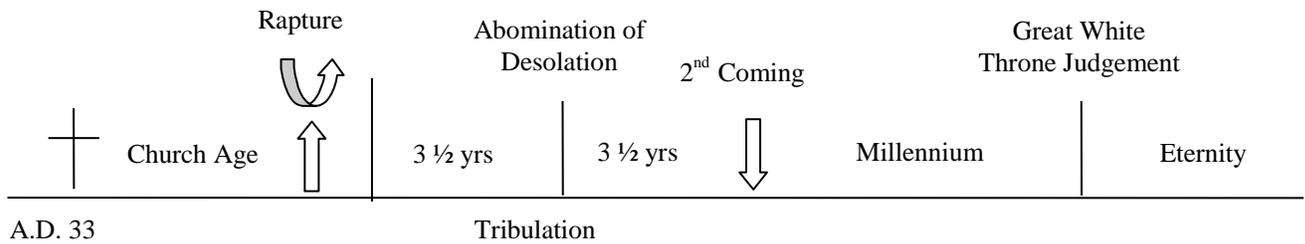
4:9-10 – Love – The Thessalonians were loving the brethren – an affection between believers. Another proof of their salvation was God’s work in them to move them to brotherly love. Paul makes it clear that we should not be satisfied with our progress in sanctification. We should “excel still more.”

❖ **Am I excelling still more?**

4:11-12 – Disciplined Living – Believers are to be quiet/modest and not showy, attending to their own business and hard workers providing for their own needs so they do not depend on unbelievers.

❖ **Do I work hard to provide for myself and family?**

4:13-18 – Death and the Rapture – The return of Jesus is a prominent doctrine in Scripture. Evangelicals all hold that Christ will return, though they differ, sometimes significantly, on the details. Though we will touch briefly on the major doctrinal positions, the diagram below presents the premillennial second coming and pretribulational rapture position held by VBC.



Paul had taught the imminent return of Jesus as the great hope to sustain believers through times of persecution. They were excited about the rapture, but some of the Thessalonian believers had died and their friends or family were grieving that they were going to miss the rapture. Not only will the dead believers not miss the event, they will rise from the dead and be raised first so as to meet with the living believers in the air and then "always be with the Lord." This doctrine was great comfort for the entire church.

¹³But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep, so that you will not grieve as do the rest who have no hope. ¹⁴For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus. ¹⁵For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. ¹⁶For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of *the* archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord. ¹⁸Therefore comfort one another with these words.

❖ **Do I look forward expectantly for the rapture?**

5:1-11 – The Day of the Lord – Paul now changes his emphasis from the "catching up" and moves on to the meaning of the term "the Day of the Lord." The change in subject from hope to judgment indicates that the Day of the Lord is a distinctly different subject from the rapture and conveys a definite implication that the Day of the Lord will not include the rapture.

There is no need to say anything about the time of the Day of the Lord. Unlike the Rapture, which is imminent, there will be signs that herald the arrival of the Day of the Lord.

“The day of the Lord” is found frequently within the scriptures: Isa 2:12; 13:6, 9; Ezek 13:5; 30:3; Joel 1:15; 2:1,11,31,3:14; Amos 5:18, 20; Obad 15; Zeph 1:7, 14; Zech 14:1; Mal 4:5; Acts 2:20; 1 Thess. 5:2; 2 Thess 2:2; 2 Peter 3:10.

The phrase describes God's cataclysmic future judgment on the wicked. A systemization of the passages describing the Day of the Lord indicates it is an extended period of time, which appears to include the entire Tribulation (or perhaps the last half of the Tribulation – the Great Tribulation) through the Millennial Kingdom to when the current heavens and earth are done away prior to the Great White Throne judgment.

Since the Day of the Lord will come suddenly and unexpectedly bringing destruction on those who are spiritually unaware, believers should be alert and sober. The great news for the Thessalonian believers is that their destiny is not wrath, but deliverance through Jesus.

Eschatological truths should move us to "encourage one another, and build up one another."

❖ **Is my encouragement for those suffering Scripturally based?**

5:12-22 – Holy Living – Similar to Peter, the description of God's future wrath moves Paul to write of holy living now so he gives a series of exhortations

¹⁰But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up. ¹¹Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, **what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness,** ¹²looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be destroyed by burning, and the elements will melt with intense heat!

❖ **Am I striving for holy conduct and godliness?**

1. Believer to elder relationships – The body is to appreciate those who diligently labor among them, and have charge over them in the Lord and give them instruction, and that they esteem them very highly in love because of their work.

❖ **Do I appreciate and esteem my elders?**

2. Live in peace with one another.

❖ **Do I strive for peace?**

3. Interact with one another in a way that builds each other up: admonish the unruly, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with everyone.

❖ **Do I respond appropriately for fellow believers outside of God's moral will?**

4. Do not repay another with evil for evil, but always seek after that which is good for one another and for all people.

❖ **Do I always seek after that which is good for my brothers and sisters?**

5. Rejoice always; pray without ceasing; in everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

❖ **Am I living in God's will (rejoice, pray, give thanks)?**

6. Do not quench the Spirit; do not despise prophetic utterances.

❖ **Are the words of Christ dwelling richly in me?**

7. Examine everything carefully; hold fast to that which is good; abstain from every form of evil.

❖ **Am I abstaining from evil?**

Conclusion(5:23-28)

Paul ends his letter with a great statement of God's faithfulness to complete the work that He started in them (Phil 1:6), a call to pray for he and his team, a call to brotherly affection; and a call to transparency.

❖ **Do I believe in my heart that God is faithful?**

Outline of Second Thessalonians

- I. Greeting and Thanksgiving (1:1-12)
- II. Instructions on End Times (2:1-17)
- III. Instructions on Christian Living (3:1-15)
- IV. Conclusion (3:16-18)

Summary

Greeting and Thanksgiving (1:1-12)

1:1-2 – Greeting – Paul begins again with a standard greeting; identical to his first letter.

1:3-12 – Thanksgiving – Paul gives thanks to God for His work in the Thessalonians which is clearly evident. They persevere in the midst of persecutions and afflictions. This is a plain indication of God's righteous judgment so that they will be considered worthy of the kingdom of God, for which indeed they are suffering.

It is obvious that the church had suffered much at the hands of the unrighteous. Paul's answer to this is to remind them of a coming reversal of roles. While the believers at Thessalonica are suffering now, the persecutors are going to face judgment at the coming of the Lord Jesus. The penalty will be "eternal destruction, away from the Lord and from the glory of His power" (v8-9). God's people can be encouraged, knowing their faithfulness will be vindicated when Jesus comes; they have not believed or suffered in vain.

When Jesus comes, He will be "marveled" at among all who have believed.

❖ **Do I marvel at Jesus now?**

Because of the coming judgment, Paul prays that the Thessalonians would glorify the name of our Lord Jesus.

Instructions on End Times (2:1-17)

2:1-2 – The Problem – Some were teaching that the Day of the Lord had already occurred. If true, it would mean the church's "catching up" taught to them by Paul and mentioned in his first letter had happened and they were left behind. It also meant Paul was wrong in his first letter and they were experiencing wrath now (For God has not destined us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, 1 Thess 5:9). This needed correcting.

2:3-12 – Correction – So-called prophetic utterances (spirit) or forged letters and messages supposedly from Paul are wrong. In his first letter, Paul taught that the Day of the Lord would come suddenly, unexpectedly, and unhappily (1 Thess 5:1). Now he explains that certain events must occur before the Day of the Lord. He had taught them about these things when he was with them for that short period (v5).

1. A great apostasy (v3).
2. A man of lawlessness, the son of destruction, the Antichrist, is revealed (v 3-4; 8-9). When will he be "revealed"? The seven year tribulation (Dan 9:24-27) begins when the Antichrist signs a seven year peace treaty with Israel (Dan 9:27). At some point he will take his seat in the (rebuilt) temple of God (at the midpoint of the tribulation).
3. The Restrainer is removed (v6-7). The body of believers at the rapture in whom individually the Holy Spirit dwells.

2:13-17 – Believers' Destiny – We are not destined for wrath or to see the Day of the Lord. We have been chosen by God from the beginning for salvation. Therefore, stand firm and hold onto God's word. God has given us eternal comfort and good hope by grace. We do not have to worry about missing our future with God.

❖ **Am I standing firm?**

Instructions on Christian Living (3:1-15)

3:1-5 – Prayer – Paul commands the Thessalonians to pray. They are to pray for Paul and his team so the word of the Lord would spread rapidly and be glorified and that they will be rescued from perverse and evil men. They are to remember that the Lord is faithful to fulfill His promises. Paul prays for them; for their hearts to be directed into the love of God and the steadfastness of Christ.

❖ **Am I a person of prayer?**

3:6-15 – Undisciplined Living – Paul commands the Thessalonians to keep away from every brother who leads an unruly life; who is willfully rebellious against God's word. His instructions here are in line with all teaching on church discipline. The church members are to withdraw support and social contact from sinning brothers and sisters.

Some in the Thessalonian church had stopped working because they figured "why bother since Jesus is coming to get us out of here, so we'll just kick back and wait." Not only were they loafers and freeloaders, they were busybodies (v11) interfering in other peoples' lives. While Paul maintained his confidence in the Lord's imminent return, he rebuked them for their idleness. He pointed to his team's example of working as well as ministering so that they would not be a burden to anyone. He reminded them of what he had instructed when he was in their church, "if anyone will not work, neither let him eat."

Paul urged them, instead, to be examples in the fellowship, to earn their own living, and not grow weary in well doing.

If anyone in the body of Christ does not obey God's word, they are to be admonished – church disciplined for the goal of restoration.

❖ **Do I take sin seriously?**

Conclusion (3:16-18)

Paul concludes his letter by reiterating the Lord's faithfulness to grant peace in every circumstance. His grace is ours through humble approach.

¹⁶Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. Heb 4:16

❖ **Do I believe in my heart that God is faithful?**

Homework

Read 1 Timothy.