

ABIDE: A BIBLE READING CHALLENGE

JOURNEY THROUGH THE NEW TESTAMENT

THE MAN OF PERDITION

2 THESSALONIANS

Never underestimate the power of bad theology. It has taken and twisted, disheartened, discouraged, confused, and vexed Christians from the beginning. And in terms of damage, some of the worst false teachings attack the very hope a Christian has at Christ's return, and that is what happened here.

You should notice a familiar theme in this little letter of Paul, and that theme is the second coming of Christ. But you will also notice a little bit of a different direction taken. The reason this is the case is because this is when we found out about the two different parts to the second coming of Christ. Paul dealt with the first part in 1 Thessalonians, and then he deals with the second part in this letter.

Paul wrote this letter as a clarification to what he had previously explained. This wasn't because Paul was unclear in any way, it was that there were some false teachers that had come into this church and really created some upsetting teachings that these believers just did not know how to reconcile.

Just to remind ourselves a bit, the persecution was getting a little heated. That's probably a gross understatement. The persecution was severe. They knew a little bit about the tribulation period—they knew that it would be awful— therefore it was suggested that they had somehow missed the second coming and were under God's judgment and actually unknown participants of great tribulation (if that tells you how bad they were suffering).

So Paul writes this letter to calm them down, encourage them, and give them a little more information. We rejoice along with them because of their questions, we get more information as well.

Just for a few distinctions between the two, in 1 Thessalonians, Christ will return in the air. In the second letter to the Thessalonians, Christ returns with His saints. In the first mention of the second coming of Christ, Paul is explaining the rapture. In the second mention of Christ's return, Paul is explaining the time of tribulation that will occur at the second portion of Christ's return. As far as the book of Revelation is concerned, the corresponding passages would be Revelation 4:1 for what Paul describes in 1 Thessalonians. What Paul is explaining in 2 Thessalonians can be examined in Revelation 19:11.

How to Think About 2 Thessalonians

Sometimes all you need is for someone that loves to tell you to keep moving forward. That's what Paul tried to do. Their need for encouragement was more than matched by Paul's desire to care for them.

As Paul reaches out in this letter to tell them that he thinks of them, and that he prays for them, he also answers their question directly by explaining that in order for the end times to truly come about, two things had to happen: 1) There would be an apostasy (2:3) and 2) The Man of Sin would be revealed (3:7). Watch how the letter is presented:

Let Me Give You Comfort (2 Thessalonians 1:3-12)—Paul addressed the problems these young Christians were facing by comforting them in a couple of different ways.

Encouragement (1:3-4): Paul praises them for growing in their faith, and in love, and mentions how that this was all in spite of the persecutions they were facing.

Admonishment (1:5-12): Verse 11 says, "Wherefore also we pray always for you, that our God would count you worthy of this calling, and fulfill all the good pleasure of his goodness, and the work of faith with power;" The words here Paul uses can stoke a flickering heart to a heat producing flame once again for struggling believer. We can see young Christians perk up as this letter was read from the pulpit. Hands gripped tightly around another's as nods of affirmation came from around the congregation. "We can take one more step together! We can endure so that God will count us worthy!"

Let Me Give You Counsel (2:1-17)— There were a few matters that needed to be addressed. Because some were so faint of heart because of the persecution, their hearts became easily taken aback by certain false teachings about prophecy.

Stand Firm (2:1-2): Verse 2 "That ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, that the day for Christ is at hand." Apparently, these people who were trying to make their view of the end times more credible, were also writing letters in Paul's name and sending them to these believers. But Paul tells them not to believe anything they hear in this way, even if there is a letter that bears his name because there were some things that had to happen first.

Look Out (2:3-12): Paul tells us that there is a liar coming called the man of perdition, and there will be a great falling away from the truth. This man will declare himself to be God, he'll want to be worshiped, and he'll sit in the temple of God. That said, there are two things to be on the lookout for: 1) The great falling away and 2) the antichrist. That is how we know it's not time for us to leave this world yet— these things haven't happened.

Keep Moving (2:13-17): Until God calls us home, we have to keep fighting for the faith. That's what Paul says. Verse 17, "Comfort your hearts, and establish you in every good word and work." "Keep moving," Paul says, "you're not done, yet."

Let Me Give You Correction (2 Thessalonians 3:1-18)— Paul asks for prayer from this congregation, but after he does, he addresses a few problems that had come up because of this unhealthy and unbiblical view of the second coming.

Work Or Don't Eat (3:6-15): Some of these church members were taking advantage of other church member's generosity. Since it was thought that Jesus was coming very soon, there were some who were selling all of their belongings, quitting their jobs, and just doing little trivial things to get by, but what they were doing was living off of the grace of others. What a terrible witness and abuse! Paul tells them to start working, or stop eating. What they were doing was not honorable, and Paul said that if they continued on in this destructive path, they were to be cut off from the congregation until they came to a place of repentance in their life about this issue. Harsh words. But if we're like our Savior, He worked until the end, and still works in heaven, and is working right now to bring us back home, and we'll work together with Him forever in heaven. This was damaging, and

unChristlike in the highest degree and Paul wanted them to put a stop to it. However, when we find people in this position, they are not to be treated like an enemy; they are to be encouraged to do what is right.

What to Look for in 2 Thessalonians

Key Terms—

Man of Perdition— In the King James Version, you will see this term rendered “man of sin.” But literally translated, it is perdition— a man of destruction. It is a direct reference to the antichrist. He stands in direct opposition to Jesus Christ and will bring about, along with Satan himself, the horrors of the tribulation.

The Day of the Lord— When Paul is describing the destruction of the tribulation the thought here is not annihilation, where the world and the unbeliever would cease to exist, but rather the loss of everything good and everything of value. God will no longer restrain evil to the degree He does even now, and the results are absolutely devastating and horrifying. There has not been a terror this world has experienced like the one coming at this time.

What to Gain in 2 Thessalonians

Never Stop Making Progress— As you read the constant encouragement of Paul to remain faithful and established, we see that there really is no good reason to stop working for Him no matter what we face. Do we experience trouble? Sure. Do we experience confusion? Absolutely. Do we have to deal with inconsiderate people? No doubt. But if we’re really serious about following Christ, then we don’t get to stop. There is always righteousness to pursue. There are always saints to be established. There is always evil to avoid. Never stop making progress.

The Goodness of God is Really Good— When we read terms like ‘man of destruction’ and the ‘Day of the Lord’ and realize what is coming ahead, we see God’s goodness in the fact that God provided a way to save us from all of that mess.

The Wrath of God is Really Terrible— One day God’s wrath will be unleashed on an unbelieving society. We can look out in the world and see suffering, injustice, and evil everywhere we look, but to think about what is to come as God finally begins to bring judgment down on all of it, it’s shocking to the mind and brings an unmatched intensity and seriousness to our hearts. One day ultimate, and perfect, justice will come, and it will be terrible.

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