2 THESALONIANS

Date: The obvious similarities between 1 & 2 Thessalonians make it rather easy to place the date of 2 Thessalonians. It was obviously written not long after 1 Thessalonians and probably in response to information given after the delivery of 1 Thessalonians.

Purpose: It is clear from the content of 2 Thessalonians that Paul is further developing thoughts and ideas from 1 Thessalonians. Therefore the letter is named 2 Thessalonians. Paul writes with some very clear intent here.

- To encourage the Thessalonians in their persecution
- To answer key questions and address obvious misunderstandings about eschatological topics
- To give instruction about the Christian work ethic and church discipline

Review of Purpose and Themes present in 1 & 2 Thessalonians: The content of things covered in 1 & 2 Thessalonians is really quite remarkable. Because Paul had spent such little time with them, he writes to give both instruction and encouragement to them. Therefore his writing is uniquely suited for their difficult situation being such a young church and facing the difficult task of growing and learning with few mature leaders and persecution from other hostile religious peoples. Therefore Paul’s general purpose was one of encouragement and instruction, but he writes with several themes and topics in view in order to address important matters needed in their theological development. His topics include:

- Joy, Thanksgiving and Encouragement for a healthy new church
- Responsibilities of a Healthy Church
- Instructions for Godly Living
- Eschatological Topics of grave importance

Joy, Thanksgiving and Encouragement for a healthy new church
Paul spends the entire first chapter of 1 Thessalonians thanking God and commending the Thessalonians for their great faith.

1 Thessalonians 1:2-3 - 2 We give thanks to God always for all of you, making mention of you in our prayers; 3 constantly bearing in mind your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the presence of our God and Father, NASB

He was sure they were God’s very elect and chosen people because of the fruits of their lives. Paul was greatly endeared and encouraged by the Thessalonians, especially the way in which they enthusiastically received the Gospel and the Word of God.

1 Thessalonians 1:4-5 - 4 knowing, brethren beloved by God, His choice of you; 5 for our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction; just as you know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake. NASB

1 Thessalonians 2:13 - 13 And for this reason we also constantly thank God that when you received from us the word of God's message, you accepted it not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the word of God, which also performs its work in you who believe. NASB

In 2 Thessalonians, Paul continues his encouragement to them, expressing his gratitude for both their great faith and abounding love, as well as their perseverance in the serious persecutions they were enduring.

2 Thessalonians 2:13-14 - 13 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. 14 And it was for this He called you through our gospel, that you may gain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. NASB

Questions? shaansloan@att.net  www.heavenslight.org  66
2 Thessalonians 1:3-4 - 3 We ought always to give thanks to God for you, brethren, as is only fitting, because your faith is greatly enlarged, and the love of each one of you toward one another grows ever greater; 4 therefore, we ourselves speak proudly of you among the churches of God for your perseverance and faith in the midst of all your persecutions and afflictions which you endure. NASU

This was indeed a model church of faith, hope, love and holy lives who were both evangelical and steadfast even in the face of persecution.

Responsibilities of a Healthy Church
MacArthur writes, “The Thessalonian epistles catalog the marks of a healthy growing church. They give the responsibilities to the congregation (1 Thess 5:12, 14-15); the congregation to the leaders (1 Thess 5:13, 25-28, 2 Thess 3:1-2); of believers to grow spiritually (1 Thess 5:16-22); stand firm in the midst of persecution (1 Thess 2:14-16); an live orderly lives (2 Thess 3:6-13); and the church’s responsibility to discipline sinning members (2 Thess 3:6-13). They also emphasize the church’s responsibility to reach the lost world with the saving truth of the Gospel (1 Thess 1:8-10).” This letter gives such clear and concise instructions on church life its message can hardly be mistaken.

Instructions for Godly Living and corporate church practice
In 1 Thessalonians chapters 4 and 5, Paul gives very practical instructions about godly living, even as he is commending the Thessalonians as already doing so.

1 Thessalonians 4:1-5 - Finally then, brethren, we request and exhort you in the Lord Jesus, that, as you received from us instruction as to how you ought to walk and please God (just as you actually do walk), that you may excel still more. 2 For you know what commandments we gave you by the authority of the Lord Jesus.

He commands them to avoid sexual immorality, which was so prevalent in their culture.

1 Thessalonians 4:3-5 - For this is the will of God, your sanctification; that is, that you abstain from sexual immorality: 4 that each of you know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, 5 not in lustful passion, like the Gentiles who do not know God; NASB

He also commands and exhorts them to love and to be growing in love and also to work hard, lead quiet lives and not to be in any need.

1 Thessalonians 4:9-12 - 9 Now as to the love of the brethren, you have no need for anyone to write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another; 10 for indeed you do practice it toward all the brethren who are in all Macedonia. But we urge you, brethren, to excel still more, 11 and to make it your ambition to lead a quiet life and attend to your own business and work with your hands, just as we commanded you; 12 so that you may behave properly toward outsiders and not be in any need. NASB

In 1 Thessalonians chapter 5:12-21 is some of the most concise instructions on godly living and corporate church behavior in all of Paul’s letters. In 2 Thessalonians chapter 3:6-14, Paul writes a lengthy section explaining the process of church discipline and commanding them to carry it out, specifically how it relates to the problem of the Christian work ethic which was being disregarded by some in the Thessalonians church.

2 Thessalonians 3:6 - 6 Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep aloof from every brother who leads an unruly life and not according to the tradition which you received from us. NASB

Eschatological Topics of grave importance
Of all of the Pauline writings, 1 & 2 Thessalonians deal most profoundly with Eschatology. By Eschatology we mean the study of “last things” or, of the “end times” if you will. In fact, the issues that Paul deals with here have absolutely massive implications for the whole world of mankind, whereas Paul actually speaks in great detail about the end of the world as we know it, the eagerly expected Second Coming of Christ Himself, to deliver His people and to bring judgment on a world full of rebellious sinners. The things which are here spoken of are some

Questions? shaanslomn@att.net  www.heavenslight.org  67
of the most profoundly important writings in all of the Word of God. Truly these warnings from God prove the very divine character of the Bible. What book in all of human history has spoken with such majesty and authoritative imperative as the Bible when it speaks to us about the end of the world at the powerful hand of God, and of the coming judgment of mankind. Here in Thessalonians we get a sneak peak at these most important and crucial issues of Bible Prophecy. And it comes to us in the form of instruction and practical explanation for us to understand very clearly and concisely.

- **Deliverance of God’s people at the first resurrection** – Here in 1 Thessalonians chapter 4:13-18 is the famous passage on the rapture of the church which even deals with the death of Christians and their future hope. Here is pictured one very important event called the First Resurrection (see pgs 49-53 above). We also learn in 1 Thessalonians that we are not destined for God’s wrath like the wicked, but more than twice are given promises of deliverance from God’s wrath.
  1 Thessalonians 1:10 - 10 and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, that is Jesus, who delivers us from the wrath to come. NASB

- **The Second Coming of Christ** – In the book of 1 Thessalonians there is a reference to the Second Coming in every chapter (1 Thessalonians 1:10, 2:19, 3:13, 4:16-17, 5:23). In 1 Thessalonians 5:2 and 2 Thessalonians 2:2 this coming is referred to as “the day of the Lord.” In 2 Thessalonians chapter 1:7-10 we have not only a reference to the Second Coming but also the destruction of the ungodly and judgment of those who have rejected the Gospel.
  2 Thessalonians 1:7-10 - 7 and to give relief to you who are afflicted and to us as well when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, 8 dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. 9 And these will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power, 10 when He comes to be glorified in His saints on that day, and to be marveled at among all who have believed — for our testimony to you was believed. NASB

Later in chapter 2:8 we have a reference to the Lord Jesus Himself personally destroying the Anti-Christ at His coming.
  2 Thessalonians 2:8 - 8 And then that lawless one will be revealed whom the Lord will slay with the breath of His mouth and bring to an end by the appearance of His coming; NASB

- **Explanation of the coming day of wrath and judgment including instructions about the Antichrist and Great Tribulation** – Both 1 & 2 Thessalonians deal with God’s judgment and destruction of the wicked and rebellious world. Paul explains in 1 Thessalonians that “the day of the Lord will come like a thief” to the unbelieving world, and when it comes, it will bring “sudden destruction” down upon them who believe themselves to be safe from harm.
  1 Thessalonians 5:2-3 - 2 For you yourselves know full well that the day of the Lord will come just like a thief in the night. 3 While they are saying, "Peace and safety!" then destruction will come upon them suddenly like birth pangs upon a woman with child, and they shall not escape.

However Paul instructs the Christians that this day will not “overtake them like a thief” because they walk in the “light of day,” enlightened by the knowledge of the signs of His coming.
  1 Thessalonians 5:4-5 - 4 But you, brethren, are not in darkness, that the day should overtake you like a thief; 5 for you are all sons of light and sons of day. NASB

After the passage in 2 Thessalonians 1:7-10 (quoted above), where Paul describes the destruction of the Gospel rejecting sinners, he then goes into a lengthy discourse on Questions? shaansloan@att.net www.heavenslight.org
the revelation of the Anti-Christ and the Great Tribulation period in 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12. Although Paul does not expressly call this the Great Tribulation as Jesus does in Matthew 24:15-21, Mark 13:14-20, we know clearly from other texts in Scripture that the events of the Anti-Christ’s rise to power and reign of terror are the very events that make up the Great Tribulation period, which are included in the Seventieth Week of Daniel (Daniel 9:24-27, 11:29-12:3). Paul does in fact give many very clear indications of the nature and character of this dreadful time in human history. These events are also cataloged in such passages as Revelation 13-14, Daniel 7, 8 and 9-12, as well as the Olivet Discourse of our Lord as described above. Understand that 1 & 2 Thessalonians are the only letters wherein Paul gives such extensive instruction about eschatological events surrounding the Second Coming of Christ, barring a few brief references in various other letters.

I might add that much of this Pauline Eschatology very closely parallels the teaching of our Lord in His Olivet Discourse which is recorded in Mathew 24-25, Mark 13 and Luke 21. The similarities are striking, but more than this, follow very distinct patterns and themes. Even though our Lord’s discourse follows a chronological timeline more than Paul’s, nevertheless they expose the same topics with much clarity and force, as we will see in the course of our study.

Similarities and differences between 1 & 2 Thessalonians

Tension between 1 & 2 Thessalonians concerning imminency. See Beale pg 29.... While 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11 affirms that Christ’s coming will occur at an unexpected time, 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12 says that definite signs will appear before Christ returns. Note also, that this tension between unexpectedness and signs preceding Christ return exists in the Gospels, including in the Olivet Discourse of our Lord. Throughout Scripture we are told of the certain and imminent return of Christ, and yet we are give signs that will precede His coming in vivid detail and accompanying order of events leading up to His return. This tension however is easily resolved by an examination of these passages and a clear understanding of the intent and scope of the doctrine of Imminency. In short, no one knows the exact day or hour that Christ will return (Matthew 24:36, 44, Mark 13:32), but Christians are told the season of His coming will be something they can clearly identify by the signs and events leading up to it (Matthew 24:14-15, 21-22, 25, 29-31, Mark 13:10, 14, 19-20, 23-27), signs and events that will be deceptively unclear to an unbelieving world (Matt 24:37-44, Luke 21:34-36, 1 Thess 5:2-4).

Parousia (Coming) in 1 & 2 Thessalonians. It is important to note as we embark on a look at 2 Thessalonians how Paul used the term “coming,” (parousia - Gk), in 1 Thessalonians. This is because in 2 Thessalonians Paul is building on the theological framework he built in 1 Thessalonians in order to further clarify and instruct on the topics at hand. Of course, a major theme in both letters is the “coming of the Lord,” which Paul is further clarifying details about in chapters 1 and 2 of 2 Thessalonians. One could argue that this is the main point of the letter, that is the clarifications regarding the “coming of the Lord.”

1 Thessalonians 2:19-20 - 19 For who is our hope or joy or crown of exultation? Is it not even you, in the presence of our Lord Jesus at His coming? 20 For you are our glory and joy. NASB
1 Thessalonians 3:13 - 13 so that He may establish your hearts unblamable in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all His saints. NASB
1 Thessalonians 4:15-17 - 15 For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, and remain until the coming of the Lord, shall not precede those who have fallen asleep. 16 For 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 shall rise first. 17 Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and thus we shall always be with the Lord. NASB

Questions? shaansloan@att.net www.heavenslight.org 69
1 Thessalonians 5:23-24 - 23 Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. NASB

In 1 Thessalonians Paul established much detail regarding the “coming of the Lord” and what exactly happened at that time. In fact, he mentioned it in every chapter of 1 Thessalonians. He established key points about it:

- The Coming would be personal and bodily – 1 Thess 4:16
- The Coming would visible by the entire world – 1 Thess 4:15-5:9
- The Coming was the partial fulfillment of the Old Testament “Day of the Lord” – 1 Thess 5:1-2
- This Coming would surprise the unbelieving world, but the Christians would not be surprised by this as the season of His return was very clear to them – 1 Thess 5:3-5
- It would bring deliverance to God’s people who were alive by sudden rapture – 1 Thess 4:16-17
- It would bring sudden destruction on the unbelieving world - 1 Thess 5:2-3
- It would be accompanied by the First Resurrection of the “dead in Christ” – 1 Thess 4:15-16
- The Coming included both His glorious appearing with angels and trumpets, as well as the rapture and resurrection, these happen at the same time - 1 Thess 4:16-17

Therefore when Paul speaks of the “coming of the Lord” in 2 Thessalonians, we must understand that he has already laid this groundwork. Notice the similarities, but also the added details given in 2 Thessalonians, when he is giving further clarification to what he had written in 1 Thessalonians.

2 Thessalonians 1:7-8 - 7 and to give relief to you who are afflicted and to us as well when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, 8 dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. NASB

2 Thessalonians 2:1-3 - Now we request you, brethren, with regard to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and our gathering together to Him, 2 that you may not be quickly shaken from your composure or be disturbed either by a spirit or a message or a letter as if from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come. 3 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, NASB

2 Thessalonians 2:7-8 - 8 And then that lawless one will be revealed whom the Lord will slay with the breath of His mouth and bring to an end by the appearance of His coming; NASB

Consider then, key details concerning the coming of the Lord which Paul reaffirms in 2 Thessalonians, as well as details he adds.

- The Coming is seen as the glorious return with angels and the destruction of sinners as a partial fulfillment of the Old Testament “Day of the Lord” – 2 Thess 1:7-9
- The Coming is considered by Paul as the same event as the rapture and also the “Day of the Lord” – 2 Thess 2:1-2
- The Coming (Rapture and Day of the Lord) is preceded by the apostasy and revelation of the Antichrist which equates these events in the chronology of the Olivet Discourse Matt 24:10-22, 29-31 – 2 Thess 2:1-8
- The Coming is when Jesus will destroy the Antichrist which equates all these references in 1 & 2 Thess with Revelation 19-20 and also the Olivet Discourse – 2 Thess 2:8
- The Coming of the Lord is seen as bringing the final eschatological wrath of God (eternal judgment), on those who reject the Gospel – 2 Thess 1:7-9

With these things in mind, remember that 2 Thessalonians is found having the context of 1 Thessalonians in the background. This is important to remember as we dig into 2 Thessalonians.

Questions? shaansloan@att.net www.heavenslight.org 70