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### Introduction to "2 Thessalonians"

Félix H. Cortez

*Andrews University*, [fcortez@andrews.edu](mailto:fcortez@andrews.edu)

Keldie Paroschi

*Brazil Adventist University*

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# 2 Thessalonians

Since Paul had stressed the necessity of being prepared for Christ's return in his first letter to the Thessalonians (1 Thess. 5:1-11), many of his readers seem to have concluded that the apostle expected Christ's immediate return or that it was already present in some spiritual way (2 Thess. 2:2-3). Paul reminds the converts at Thessalonica that this was not the case. He had taught them that certain events must take place first (2:3-12). Instead of living in a state of anxiety (2:2), he urged them to remain faithful to the gospel they had learned from him (2:15) and to work hard and live quiet lives as they waited for the return of Jesus (3:6-13).

## AUTHOR

As with 1 Thessalonians, 2 Thessalonians offers itself as coming from Paul, Silas (Silvanus) and Timothy (1:1), but Paul is the primary author as, he indicates at the conclusion (3:17). Both of the epistles to the Thessalonians share several stylistic and linguistic similarities that support Pauline authorship. Early Church Fathers such as Polycarp, Ignatius, and Justin were familiar with the letter and accepted Paul as its author.

## DATE

The similarities between the two letters to the Thessalonians and the continuity in the topics addressed seem to indicate a composition within a short period of each other. Also, 2 Thessalonians 2:15 suggests a previous letter from Paul to the church. Apparently, 2 Thessalonians was written during Paul's second missionary journey from the city of Corinth, either late in 50 or early AD 51.

## AUDIENCE

Paul writes a second time to the believers in Thessalonica (1:1; see the Introduction to 1 Thessalonians).

## PURPOSE AND MAIN THEMES

Paul discusses some of the same issues as in 1 Thessalonians and states that the believers have shown good spiritual progress (1:3; cf. 1 Thess. 3:10; 4:9, 10). He also urges them to continue to endure the hostility they faced as a young community (vv. 4-12).

In his first letter, Paul had clarified some points about eschatology—particularly the resurrection at Christ's second coming. The believers, however, took Paul's teaching to a different extreme. He again expands on the topic and points out that certain events must yet take place before Christ's return. Christians must learn to live with the tension of waiting for the future signs of Jesus' second advent (2:1-12).



Date of writing  
ca. AD 50-51



Another issue involved the problem of some believers who refused to work and depended on the charity of their fellow believers, and thus caused problems among the community (3:6-8). Paul stresses that working to support oneself is noble in both God's eyes and the eyes of others, and helps sustain God's mission (vv. 6-15).

## STRUCTURE

Although 2 Thessalonians follows the same basic pattern of all Paul's letters, it deals with the particular concerns facing the new believers in Thessalonica. In the introduction, the apostle focuses particularly on encouraging the new believers in Thessalonica, who were still being persecuted for their faith (1:3-4). He tells them that when Jesus returns, they would be vindicated and welcomed into Christ's kingdom (1:5-12).

The apostle's words of encouragement carry over into the body of the letter as he attempts to correct the mistaken view of the Thessalonians regarding the Second Coming. He assures them that they need not be afraid that the Second Coming is imminent, or already present in some sort of spiritual manner. He reminds them that before Christ returns, there would be a great "falling away" and a "man of sin" would be revealed "who opposes and exalts" himself against God (2:3-4). It is only after those events occur that Christ would return to destroy those who oppose Him with the "brightness of his coming" (v. 8). Until that day comes, the apostle urges the Thessalonians to remain steadfast in their faith and live quiet lives (3:1-15). Paul then ends the letter with a benediction of grace (v. 18).

## OUTLINE

- I. Introduction (1:1-12)
  - A. Greetings (1:1-2)
  - B. Thanksgiving (1:3-12)
- II. The Parousia (2:1-17)
  - A. The Coming of the Lord (2:1-3)
  - B. The Coming Apostasy and the Man of Sin (2:3-12)
  - C. The Duty and Privilege of Believers (2:13-17)
- III. Final Requests and Instructions (3:1-15)
  - A. Request for Prayer (3:1-5)
  - B. Commands for Disorderly Conduct (3:6-15)
- IV. Conclusion (3:16-18)
  - A. Personal Remarks (3:16-17)
  - B. Benediction (3:18)

## ARCHAEOLOGY

In ancient times, the emperor or ruler would often travel and visit different cities and provinces throughout the empire. The authorities would announce his arrival or *adventus* in advance, and many preparations for his visit would take place. Considering

it a great honor, people would compare such events to the coming of the gods themselves. The people whose hometown the emperor would visit would prepare special speeches, delicacies, golden wreaths, and other gifts. Wealthier cities often celebrated by constructing a new building or minting special coins. But people also associated the arrival of the emperor with justice, for he would, among other things, sign petitions and hear legal cases.



# 1 Timothy

Paul wrote his epistle to Timothy in response to the influence of false teachings that had infiltrated the church in Ephesus, apparently during his first Roman imprisonment recorded in Acts. Unable to address the situation in Ephesus at the moment, the apostle urged Timothy to take on the difficult task in his place. The situation was particularly challenging since the false teachings were not merely rooted in the laity, but also among some of the elders within the church.

## AUTHOR

The opening of the letter identifies Paul as its author (1:1). The fact that church fathers such as Polycarp and Athenagoras quoted from it indicates that they regarded it as Pauline.

## DATE

Paul wrote the so-called "Pastoral Epistles" (1 and 2 Timothy, and Titus) after his release from his first Roman imprisonment around AD 62. Some have conjectured that he possibly made a missionary journey to Spain after that, although little evidence exists for such a trip (Rom. 15:24; *1 Clement* 5.7; *Acts of Paul and Thecla*), and the time frame Paul would have had to go there is very small. We do know that he became active again around the Aegean: he visited Crete, Miletus, Macedonia and Achaia, Nicopolis, where he spent a winter, and Ephesus (1 Tim. 1:3; 2 Tim. 1:15-18; 4:19, 20; Titus 3:12). Later, Paul suffered martyrdom during the reign of Nero. The question is whether it happened in the period of most intense persecution around AD 64, or whether Eusebius is correct in affirming that Paul died in AD 67. Either way, he would have written 1 Timothy a few years before his death, somewhere around the early to mid-60s.

## AUDIENCE

Paul addressed the Pastoral Epistles to his coworkers, unlike his other letters (except Philemon) that he wrote to churches. After his release from prison, he might have used Corinth as the base of his activities (2 Tim. 4:20), while always traveling to other places as well (1 Tim. 3:14; 4:13). His coworkers were also regularly on the move, and his letters were his way of communicating with them and making sure that they preached his teachings effectively in different locations. In this epistle, Paul writes to Timothy (1 Tim. 1:2; 18), most likely from Macedonia while Timothy was in Ephesus (1:3).

## PURPOSE AND MAIN THEMES

Paul's letter to Timothy seeks to support and help the younger evangelist as he deals with false teachers in Ephesus whose influence was undermining the message





and mission of the church. Since some of the false teachers appear to have occupied positions of leadership in the church, the apostle emphasizes the importance of selecting leaders who are people of integrity (3:1-13) and are faithful to the gospel (1:3-7; 19-20; 6:2b-10, 20-21). One should note that his emphasis is not on the offices or hierarchy of ministry (the term *episkopos*, often translated as "bishop" means "overseer") but on a person's character. Paul also writes about the conduct and Christian life of other believers in the church, including women, widows, slaves, and rich people (2:8-15; 3:14, 15; 5:1-16; 6:1, 2, 17-19).

## STRUCTURE

After Paul's customary introduction (1:1-2), he begins his letter by charging Timothy to remain in Ephesus to deal with a group of teachers who were undermining the church in Ephesus by proclaiming a false gospel (vv. 3-7, 18-20). The apostle describes his own experience in becoming a follower of Jesus to demonstrate that the purpose of the gospel is a life changed by God's grace, not just theological ideas (vv. 12-17). Recognizing the difficulty of Timothy's task, Paul provides Timothy with practical instructions for addressing the problems within the church. Timothy has to: (1) focus the church on its mission to the lost (2:1-7); (2) limit the influence of the false teachers (2:8-15); and (3) select church leaders who are people of integrity (3:1-13).

After telling Timothy what he needed to do in the church, Paul describes the kind of spiritual person Timothy needs to be a faithful leader himself (4:1-16). He then provides Timothy with additional instruction regarding how he should deal with other individuals within the church: widows (5:3-16), church elders (5:17-25), and slaves (6:1-2).

As Paul begins to draw his letter to a close, he returns once again to the situation with the false teachers. He first contrasts the attitude of the troublemakers in Ephesus with the godly demeanor of faithful ministers like Timothy (6:2b-16), warns against the danger of riches (vv. 17-19), and then closes with a final charge to Timothy to guard the gospel (6:20-21).

As you read through 1 Timothy, take note of the charge to preserve the gospel in the face of false teachings that lead people away from the truth.

## OUTLINE

- I. Introduction (1:1-2)
- II. The Charge to Timothy (1:3-20)
  - A. Warning against False Teachers (1:3-11)
  - B. The Good News of the Gospel (1:12-17)
  - C. Timothy's Task (1:18-20)
- III. Instructions for Dealing with the Ephesian Heresy (2:1-3:16)
  - A. Focus on Mission (2:1-7)
  - B. Limit the Influence of the False Teachers (2:8-15)
  - C. Qualifications for Selecting Christian Leaders (3:1-13)

- D. The Reason for Paul's Letter (3:14-16)
- IV. Instructions for Timothy (4:1-16)
  - A. The Predicted Apostasy (4:1-5)
  - B. Exhortations for Ministry (4:6-16)
- V. Instructions for the Church (5:1-6:2a)
  - A. Counsel for the Old and Young (5:1-2)
  - B. Counsel for Widows (5:3-16)
  - C. Counsel for Church Elders (5:17-25)
  - D. Counsel for Christian Slaves (6:1-2a)
- VI. Final Instructions (6:2b-19)
  - A. The Contrast of True and False Teachers (6:2b-16)
  - B. Counsel for the Wealthy (6:17-19)
- VII. Conclusion (6:20-21)
  - A. Paul's Final Charge to Timothy (6:20-21a)
  - B. Benediction (6:21b)

## ARCHAEOLOGY

Paul spends a significant portion of the first letter to Timothy discussing the necessary qualifications for elders and bishops in the church. What do we know about the organization of the early church? Even though he does not specify the different offices and what each was responsible for, the arrangement found in the letters is similar to the leadership structures of Jewish synagogues and Greco-Roman *collegia* or groups of people who gathered for religious, professional, or social reasons. The *collegia* usually had specific goals to achieve, and they collected financial contributions from their members to use for such purposes. They also attended social events together, sometimes ate together, and distributed monetary gifts to their members. Their organizational structure usually included magistrates and a council.

A synagogue could refer to both the building and the Jewish community using it. The *hasan* was the synagogue's administrative representative, responsible for financial records, an arbiter of court decisions, and in charge of other things. The synagogue served the religious, educational, legal, financial, and political purposes of the local Jewish community. As a reflection of the *collegia* and the synagogues, the early Christian churches were gatherings of people who shared the same beliefs. Their organization reflected, however, not only their religious beliefs but also their different needs as a community (cf. Acts 6:1-7). All this is very different from the episcopal hierarchy of the churches in Asia Minor, described by Ignatius of Antioch in the second century AD.