

2 THESSALONIANS

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BACKGROUND

In his first letter to the Thessalonians, Paul wrote concerning the involvement of deceased believers in the Rapture, and about the terrible "day of the Lord" (the Tribulation) that would follow the Rapture (see [1 Thessalonians: Background](#) and exposition on [1 Thes. 4:13-5:11](#)). Mistaking their present persecution for the dark days of which Paul wrote, the Thessalonians concluded that they had missed the Rapture and were now enduring the Tribulation—a misunderstanding perhaps reinforced by false teachers ([2 Thes. 2:2](#)). Paul wrote this second letter to show them that their hard times did not constitute the Tribulation and to assure them of the far better things in store for them as believers.

AUTHOR

Paul ([2 Thes. 1:1](#); [2 Thes. 3:17](#); see [Romans: Author](#)).

DATE AND LOCATION

C. A.D. 51, from Corinth, one to three months after 1 Thessalonians.

» See also: [Illustration: Epistles of Paul, The](#)

RECIPIENTS

See [1 Thessalonians: Recipients](#).

PURPOSE

- To assure the Thessalonians that the Tribulation was not already taking place ([2 Thes. 1:1-2:12](#))
- To show that Christ's second advent would deliver them from their persecutions and result in the judgment of their enemies ([2 Thes. 1:5-12](#))
- To instruct them on church discipline ([2 Thes. 3:6-15](#))

UNIQUE FEATURES

- 2 Thessalonians gives the Bible's most detailed description of the Antichrist ([2 Thes. 2:1-12](#)).

OUTLINE

1. THE DAY OF THE LORD: ENCOURAGEMENT ([2 Thes. 1](#))

2. THE DAY OF THE LORD: INSTRUCTION ([2 Thes. 2:1-12](#))

III. THE DAY OF THE LORD: EXHORTATION ([2 Thes. 2:13-3:18](#))

TIMELINE

A.D. 35:	Paul's conversion
A.D. 51:	Paul in Thessalonica on 2nd journey, writes 1 Thes. & 2 Thes.
A.D. 57:	Paul in Thessalonica on 3rd journey
A.D. 60:	Paul imprisoned in Rome
c. A.D. 67:	Paul martyred

[2 Thes. 1:1-12](#) *Future justice, future judgment.* Paul thanked God for the Thessalonian believers, who were persevering amid persecution ([2 Thes. 1:3-4](#)). That persecution, said Paul, simply showed that they were right in God's sight while their persecutors were wrong. When Christ returned, their persecutors would be punished while they themselves would be revealed to be true children of God ([2 Thes. 1:5-10](#)). Paul prayed that they would continue to be "worthy" of such suffering and would be a glorious testimony to their Lord ([2 Thes. 1:11-12](#)).

Paul gave these assurances in response to their misunderstanding about the "day of the Lord" of which he had spoken in 1 Thessalonians (see [Background](#)). Concerning the day of the Lord (also called "that day," [2 Thes. 1:10](#); see [2 Thes. 2:3](#)), see [Isaiah: Background](#) and exposition on [§][Isaiah 2:5-4:1](#). Christ would "appear from heaven" preceding that day—an event separate from the Rapture (see exposition on [§][1 Thes. 4:13-18](#)).

God's judgment will fall on two categories of sinners ([2 Thes. 1:8](#)):

- "Those who don't know God," probably those who have never heard the gospel but do have the witness of both conscience and nature and are therefore without excuse (see [Romans 1:18-20](#); [Romans 2:12-16](#)).
- "Those who refuse to obey the Good News of our Lord Jesus."

[2 Thes. 2:1-12](#) *The rise and fall of the Antichrist.* Paul assured the worried Thessalonians that the day of the Lord had not yet come, and urged them to ignore anyone claiming otherwise ([2 Thes. 2:1-2](#)). Before the day of the Lord can begin, there will first be "a great rebellion" ([2 Thes. 2:3](#); see [1 Tim. 4:1-3](#); [2 Tim. 3:1-5](#); [2 Tim. 4:3-4](#)) and the advent of "the man of lawlessness," the Antichrist ([2 Thes. 2:3-10](#)). The "great rebellion" probably refers to a time following the Rapture, when the absence of the church will allow free reign to the godless. Thus, though the faithful Thessalonians were undergoing terrible persecution, it was not the Tribulation, and they had not missed the Rapture.

The Antichrist, an agent of Satan himself ([2 Thes. 2:9](#)), also called the "one who brings destruction" ([2 Thes. 2:3](#)) and the "man of lawlessness" ([2 Thes. 2:3, 8-9](#)), will try to usurp the place of God ([2 Thes. 2:4](#)) and will be allowed by God to further lead astray those who have already rejected him ([2 Thes. 2:11-12](#)). After a brief reign, the Antichrist will be destroyed by God ([2 Thes. 2:8](#)).

While many have tried to identify the Antichrist, this and other Bible passages make only two things certain: his rise and his utter defeat. Key Bible passages on the Antichrist include [Daniel 9:20-27](#); [Daniel 11:36-45](#); [Daniel 12:5-13](#); [Zech. 11:15-17](#); [1 John 4:1-6](#); [Rev. 13:1-10](#).

The "lawlessness" that will usher in the Antichrist's reign is already present in the world but is being held in check by the one "who is holding it back" ([2 Thes. 2:7](#)), probably meaning the Holy Spirit (see [John 16:8-11](#)).

"God will send great deception upon them" ([2 Thes. 2:11](#)) shows God's sovereignty over his enemies (see [Genesis 50:20](#); [Exodus 4:21](#); [Judges 9:23](#); [1 Kings 22:19-23](#)) but in no way suggests that he condones evil (see [James 1:13-14](#)).

[2 Thes. 2:13-17](#) *Chosen by him, standing firm for him.* Having explained that they had not missed the Rapture, Paul offered additional encouragement and exhortation. Assured of salvation, they should "stand firm" for the Lord. While Paul felt great affection for the Thessalonians, he apparently agreed with Luke's assessment that they lacked the zeal of the Bereans (see [Acts 17:10-11](#)). Concerning their being "chosen" and "called . . . to salvation," see exposition on [§1 Peter 1:1-2](#).

[2 Thes. 3:1-5](#) *"Pray for me; I'll pray for you."* Paul asked for prayer for the fruitfulness of his ministry and for deliverance from his enemies. But his prayer request quickly became a prayer for the Thessalonians, that God would continue to build them up in love and perseverance.

[2 Thes. 3:6-15](#) *Dealing with the lazy and the lawless.* Christians who live "idle lives" should be strongly admonished, even separated from the fellowship of the church if that is necessary to bring them to repentance. Even amid such harsh discipline, however, the offending person should be treated as a brother or sister ([2 Thes. 3:15](#)). Elsewhere in Scripture, both Jesus and Paul prescribed total excommunication if the offender persisted in sin and unrepentance (see exposition on [§Matthew 18:15-20](#) and on [§1 Corinthians 5:1-8](#)).

Paul was concerned about reports that some of the Thessalonians were not earning their own living. He admonished them to do so, offering his own hard work as an example ([2 Thes. 3:7-9](#); see [1 Thes. 2:9](#); compare exposition on [§1 Corinthians 4:6-13](#)).

[2 Thes. 3:16-18](#) *"Take note of my handwriting!"* Paul noted that, while he dictated the body of his letters to an assistant, here as in all his letters he was adding a salutation in his own hand, as a sign of the letter's authenticity (see [Romans 16:22](#); [1 Cor. 16:21](#); [Col. 4:18](#)).