

**BIBLE STUDY GUIDES: SEEKING THE ORIGINAL AUTHOR'S INTENT**

**A SERIES OF NEW TESTAMENT STUDIES**

**By Bob Young**

**FIRST and SECOND THESSALONIANS  
with Introduction to the Thessalonian Correspondence**

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## **BIBLE STUDY GUIDES: SEEKING THE ORIGINAL AUTHOR'S INTENT**

**By Bob Young**

### **INTRODUCTION**

These Bible study guides reflect how I organize and understand the text, taking into account various exegetical factors—syntax, grammar, vocabulary, etc. Along the way, I share some observations that may help clarify passages that are difficult to understand. I have not tried to write about every passage where potential problems or differences in understanding exist. At times my notes may seem to be unnecessary comments on clear passages; in other passages some may ask why I did not include a comment. Such is the individualized nature of Bible study. Some of my comments are designed to help maintain focus on the original author's purpose for writing.

These guides are not intended to take the place of your own reading but are intended to provide help and an opportunity to check your understanding. For each chapter there is a content outline followed by textual notes. The content sections of these guides (including how the text is divided and how subsections are described) are drawn from a comparison of several modern translations and reflect the majority. The textual notes at times provide a periphrastic summary, but as noted above they are not intended to be complete. I have tried to address matters that may not be included in other sources. Texts that are easily understood and matters usually explained in other writings are not treated in detail.

My primary purpose is to make it easier for you the reader or student to analyze and understand the text. Ultimately, you are responsible for your own interpretation of the Bible and you cannot simply follow what a favorite preacher or commentator says.

### **INITIAL READING AND PARAGRAPHING**

In several previous writings, I have explained the importance of preparatory reading and personal study of the text. It is important that you learn to do this on your own. Once the text is familiar, I suggest you think about what themes you can identify and how you would mark the paragraph divisions, based on the subjects treated in the passage. Once you have completed this work, it is good to compare your paragraphing with that of several modern versions (or you can use the content section of these guides).

### **A NOTE ABOUT PARAGRAPHING**

Paragraph divisions are the key to understanding and following the original author's intent. Most modern translations are divided into paragraphs and provide a summary. Ideally, every paragraph has one central topic, truth, or thought. There will be several ways to describe the subject of the paragraph.

Only when we understand the original author's intent by following his logic and presentation can we truly understand the Bible. Only the original author is inspired—readers must take care not to change or modify the message. A first step toward integrity with the text is to develop the ability to analyze it and establish paragraphs.

Note that this introductory page is not repeated for each chapter. Many students will find it helpful to return to this introduction and reread it before beginning to read, analyze, and study a new chapter of the text.

## **BIBLE STUDY GUIDES: SEEKING THE ORIGINAL AUTHOR'S INTENT**

### **Introduction to the Thessalonian Correspondence**

#### **Summary**

- The Thessalonian letters are two of the earliest of Paul's letters, and among the earliest New Testament documents.
- The Thessalonian letters give insight into the work of Paul as a church planter and missionary. The letters reflect his concern for the infant church.
- The letters reveal both the kind of church Paul wanted to establish and the problems the new Christians encountered. The Thessalonian church is in many ways a model church.
- These letters reveal the early proclamation of the gospel and the understandings and actions that resulted.

#### **Background**

The record of Paul's arrival and stay in Thessalonica is recorded in Acts 17. The city was a port at the head of the Thermaic Gulf, and was also on the Via Ignatia, a major Roman road. Thessalonica was the largest city in Macedonia, about 200,000, and was an important center of commerce and politics. The name of the modern city today is Salonika. It attracted people from various parts of the first century world and was characterized by pagan religions and cultures. It is estimated that over one-third of the population in the first century was Jewish.

Paul came to Thessalonica from Philippi where he had been imprisoned. Had his reputation preceded him to Thessalonica? The Bible does not say, but it is certainly possible. Paul's custom was to begin his preaching in the synagogue, and Philippi did not have a synagogue. Thessalonica, however, did have a synagogue. Paul was accompanied by Silas (also known as Silvanus) and Timothy. Both are mentioned in the salutations of the letters Paul wrote to the Thessalonian church. Luke had stayed at Philippi (based on the "we" passages in Acts).

Paul preached in the synagogue three Sabbaths. His preaching is described in Acts as discussing, declaring, explaining, and saying. His message was that "Jesus is the Messiah." Some Jews, some God-fearing Gentiles, and some noble women responded favorable to his message. The God-fearing Gentiles were familiar with Judaism and were often receptive.

We do not know how long Paul was in Thessalonica on this first visit. He was there at least three weeks. In 1 Thessalonians 2 he speaks of working to support himself (his trade was tent-making). Philippians 4:16 says that the Philippian church sent monetary gifts at least twice. It is likely that he was in Thessalonica at least a month, possibly two to three months, before intense opposition arose from the Jewish leaders. As a result of the uprising and difficulty, Paul left the city by night and went to Berea. Based on references in the letters, it appears that the young church in Thessalonica continued to face much opposition after Paul's departure.

#### **Author and Date**

Paul is identified as the author, along with Timothy and Silas. Critics have questioned Paul's authorship of 2 Thessalonians, but there is no solid evidence to contradict Pauline authorship.

Some have hypothesized that the second letter preceded the first, but that theory is not widely accepted. Among the reasons given for maintaining the current order are the apparent intensification of the problems in 2 Thessalonians, possible references in 2 Thessalonians to a letter from Paul (2:2,15; 3:17), the tone of the second letter better fits as a follow-up rather than the initial letter.

The date of the letters is one the more certain dates we can establish in New Testament, based on the textual reference that Paul was brought before Gallio during his time in Corinth (Acts 18). Gallio served for a relatively short time in A.D. 51-52. Paul was in Corinth 18 months, so there is some room for flexibility, but one can work backward and date the Thessalonian correspondence A.D. 50-52 with some certainty. Working through the dates chronologically beginning with the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15) in A.D. 49-50, we note Paul's departure from Antioch on the second journey, briefly passing by the previously established churches, traveling across Asia Minor, receiving the Macedonian call, and spending a brief time in Philippi before arriving in Thessalonica. This likewise yields a date of A.D. 50 or 51 for Paul's visit, with the letters following closely thereafter.

### **Reconstructing the Historical Timeline**

Paul left Thessalonica for Berea (Acts 17) but problems also arose in Berea when some of the Jews from Thessalonica arrived. Paul left Berea for Athens where he encountered philosophers and had little success, based on the narrative of Acts 17. Based on the content of the first letter to the Thessalonians, Paul knew that he had left the church at a difficult and crucial time. At some point, Paul sent Timothy and Silas back to Macedonia. Timothy spent time in Thessalonica, perhaps for as long as six months (a longer period of time does not fit very well into the timeline above for the date of the book).

Paul worked in Athens along and then moved on to Corinth. At Corinth, Timothy and Silas returned to Paul (Acts 18:5) and Timothy brought positive news concerning the church in Thessalonica (1 Thessalonians 3). It was Timothy's report that led Paul to write the first letter to Thessalonica from Corinth. Paul addressed various questions and concerns that were likely communicated by Timothy.

The second letter was written not long after the first as Paul became aware of other problems. Some believe the second letter was written about six months after the first.

### **Purpose of the Letters**

By surveying the content of the first letter, we can say that Paul wanted--

- To encourage the church toward faithfulness in the midst of persecution
- To address some criticisms that had been raised (perhaps by the Jewish opposition) concerning his motives
- To communicate the depth of his love and concern, his pride and his confidence in the new Christians
- To answer some specific questions, one of which concerned the return of Jesus

The contents of the second letter reflect some of the same concerns. Paul wanted--

- To encourage the church in the midst of tribulations

- To correct possible misunderstandings about the Day of the Lord (the return of Jesus)
- To give instructions concerning some who had stopped working

## **BIBLE STUDY GUIDES: SEEKING THE ORIGINAL AUTHOR'S INTENT**

### **1 Thessalonians 1**

**By Bob Young**

[Note: it is suggested that the introductory materials on page 2 of this guide be read before beginning your own preparatory reading and analysis.]

#### **CONTENT**

The paragraphs included in the Content section of each chapter are merely guides. The student is encouraged to identify the paragraphs, and subsections within each paragraph, to assist in his or her own study. The division of this chapter into paragraphs is fairly standard across modern translations.

1:1, greeting or salutation

1:2-10, Thanksgiving for various aspects of the Thessalonians' example

[2-3, thanksgiving; 4-10, congratulations]

#### **STUDY HELPS**

1:1. Paul, Silas and Timothy are identified as authors, although Paul is obviously the primary author, with the other two names mentioned as those who are with him. They were also with him in the establishment of the church. This is a standard greeting in the Greek epistolary form. Of interest is that Paul does not attach an additional description such as "apostle" even though he defends his motives in Chapter 2.

The Thessalonians are described as a church (ekklesia), which is a Greek word meaning assembly in its secular usage.

1:2-10. These verses are part of one long prayer of thanksgiving that Paul offers on behalf of the Thessalonians. The admonition to "pray without ceasing" in 5:17 is well-known, but more than once in the letter Paul mentions his unceasing prayer for the church. The section of 1:2-5 is one sentence, focused on Paul's evangelism among them. This sentence includes a reference to each person in the Godhead.

1:3 mentions faith, hope, and love. The relationship of the words in these phrases is that work is the result of faith, labor is the result of love, and perseverance is the result of hope. Timothy's report of the state of the church in Thessalonica probably included this detail which is the reason for Paul's thanksgiving to God.

1:4. Paul encourages the Thessalonians to recognize that they are loved by God and chosen by God.

1:5. The situation described in vv. 3-4 is the result of the gospel. 1:5 begins with "because," because our gospel did not come to you in word only, but in power, and the Holy Spirit, and full assurance. The gospel came also through the example of the missionaries who proved their nature and their commitment to the new believers while they were among the Thessalonians. The Thessalonians had responded to the gospel; the gospel had changed their lives.

1:6-9 describes their response. They become imitators of the Lord and of the missionaries, and were examples. They were examples because they had received the message despite the tribulation and opposition. They received the message with joy which comes from the Holy Spirit. The news of how the gospel had entered Thessalonica and the response of these new believers spread (was echoed) into all of Macedonia and Achaia, and in every place.

1:9-10. These verses further describe the response of the Thessalonians—past, present, and future. They turned to God from idols. This phrase may suggest that Paul had a work among the Gentiles more extensive than the God-fearers previously mentioned, since the God-fearers would have already rejected idolatry. There is the possibility that “idols” is a figurative reference but there is no evidence to support that idea. It is also possible that Paul is describing their lives with a longer view than their most recent conversion to Christ. Formerly, they had been idol-worshippers. They had turned from pagan practices and culture.

They had turned to God to serve (slave) the living and true God in the present, and to wait (a present infinitive, reflecting future expectation) for his return. This is a summary of the gospel. Jesus was raised from the dead by God, he rescues us from coming wrath, he will return from heaven to claim us.

A reference to Jesus’ return appears at the end of every chapter in this letter.

## **BIBLE STUDY GUIDES: SEEKING THE ORIGINAL AUTHOR'S INTENT**

### **1 Thessalonians 2**

**By Bob Young**

[Note: it is suggested that the introductory materials concerning paragraphing (at the beginning of this guide) be read before beginning your own preparatory reading and analysis.]

#### **CONTENT**

The paragraphing given here is fairly standard in modern translations. Some translations divide vv. 1-13 into two separate paragraphs.

2:1-13, Paul's ministry in Thessalonica

2:14-16, the faith and patience of the Thessalonians in their current situation

2:17-20, Paul's desire to see them again

#### **STUDY HELPS**

##### Chapter Summary

This chapter reflects the Jewish opposition and questions about Paul's motives

This chapter outlines various attitudes, characteristics, and actions of an effective minister or missionary.

2:1. You know is a phrase that occurs frequently in slightly varying forms (1:4,5; 2:1,5,10,11; 3:3,4; 4:3; and 4:13 that you not be unknowing). Similar phrases are you remember and you do not need us to write. Paul uses the appositive as a form of address multiple times in the book, brothers.

2:1-6. I have made the section division at v. 6 based on the adversative conjunction, but, that begins v. 7. In this section Paul explains his motives, methods, and ministry as he came among them. His arrival in Thessalonica was not in vain (for nothing, a failure). Even though the missionaries had suffered and been mistreated in Philippi (Acts 16), they remained bold to speak the gospel in Thessalonica, where they also suffered much opposition. Gospel of God is likely a subjective genitive, the gospel that comes from God (see also vv. 8,9).

2:3. The message of exhortation or encouragement did not come from error or deceit, or from impurity (literally, or impure motives), or from deceit.

2:4. To be approved by God is literally, to be tested by God. The missionaries had experienced and survived problems as proof of their authenticity. The missionaries were still being tested. They were entrusted with the gospel and spoke to please God not human beings. This was a common way of explaining the opposition. They were pure in their motives because they withstood the examination by God.

2:5. With false motives comes manipulation, and Paul had not come with flattery or with greedy opportunism. Paul expands this point later in the chapter when he explains that he had worked to avoid being a burden to the Thessalonian church. He did not receive money from them, although we know he did receive help from Philippi (Phil. 4:16). Paul's greatest supporting evidence for the sincerity of his ministry was that the testimony would be consistent

even if God who knows all things were called as witness. This was a way of declaring truthfulness.

2:6. Paul's use of the description "apostles" appears to include Timothy and Silas. This illustrates that the term is used in the New Testament more broadly than in the sense of the Twelve. Examples include Barnabas (Acts 14:4,14), Apollos (1 Cor. 4:6), James the Lord's brother (Gal. 1:19), and the group of church representatives responsible for the contribution for the poor saints in Jerusalem (2 Cor. 8:23). The use of the word apostle in the New Testament to describe some were "sent" as messengers or representatives should be considered in interpreting 1 Cor. 12:28 and Eph. 4:11 where some were "gifted" to be apostles. Both contexts appear to refer to some besides the original apostles, which is no problem when one understands the New Testament context. The question of whether the term apostle should be used today remains open, since its use has such a tendency to miscommunicate.

Paul could have asserted his apostolic authority to make demands (possibly for financial compensation).

2:7. The translations of this verse vary due to a textual variant. Is the word infants (nepios) or gentle (epios)? The best reading is infants. We were gentle among you, rather we were as infants among you, but in a figurative sense, since the word is from roots that mean non-speaking. We did not make such demands.

The meaning of the verse is little changed by the variants. The point is that Paul and his companions were gentle and non-demanding among them, in the same way that a mother (wet-nurse) nourishes her own children.

2:8. The affection Paul felt for the Thessalonians was intense and deep, so deep that the missionaries not only were willing to give the gospel, they would have given their own lives to protect and nourish and care for these new Christians. The missionary endeavor is empty and meaningless without such compassion and concern, and without the commitment and hard work reflected in the next verse.

2:9. You remember our hard work, laboring in manual labor. Only slaves were to labor, so Paul in this statement identifies himself as a slave to the church. Paul often worked in his trade to support himself (1 Cor. 18) which also was an example to the Christians in the churches he established (2 Thess. 3:6-15). Rabbis were required to have a trade or method of livelihood. Paul says he worked day and night, likely referring to his work in tent-making by day and his work in preaching by night.

2:10. The truthfulness of what Paul was affirming was not in doubt. Not only was God a witness (v. 5), the Thessalonians were also witnesses. They had seen the behavior of the missionaries—holy, just and beyond reproach (devout, upright, and blameless).

2:11-12. Three verbs describe Paul's work: exhorting, encouraging (consoling), and imploring (affirming, witnessing) that they walk in a way worthy of God, the one calling us to share his kingdom and glory.

2:13. Paul again mentions constant prayer of thanksgiving for the way the Thessalonians had received the Word of God (the gospel). They received it as God's word (a word coming from God), not as a human word, and Paul says that word is not at work in them. The verb form literally suggests that the word is our energy, that it energizes those who receive it, accept it, and believe it.

2:14. The idea of imitation goes back to 1:6, but in this case the Thessalonians are imitators of Paul and the Judean churches in enduring suffering. In Christ is a common New Testament phrase, signifying our union with Christ. The churches of the first century endured much persecution, both from the Romans and from other religious people who rejected the exclusive nature of the gospel message. In this passage, the suffering is at the hands of the Jews who killed Jesus and the prophets, drove Paul out (possibly a reference to Acts 17:5-9), are not pleasing to God, and are hostile to all men so that they hinder Paul's speaking to the Gentiles so they can be saved. This may reflect Paul's more extensive work among the Gentiles in Thessalonica (beyond the God-fearers). Hostile to "all men" may specifically refer to the "nations", that is, the Gentiles.

These actions of the Jews fill up the measure of their sins. The idea is that they complete their evil deeds and that God's wrath comes on them.

2:17. Paul has previously used the figure of a mother and a father to describe his relationship to the Thessalonians. Now in the phrase "taken away" or "being separated" he uses the concept of being orphaned. The concept demands an agent or instrument, so that someone else (Jewish opponents) were responsible for the separation. This is an important point because some were saying that his rapid departure and continuing absence showed his lack of concern and reflected impure motives. Paul in this section and the next affirms his care for the Thessalonians.

He greatly desired to see them, had wanted to come to them once and again, but was hindered by Satan. Paul considered the Thessalonian church an evidence of his apostleship and effective ministry. In this final section of the chapter, he once again mentions the coming of Jesus. At the coming of Jesus, they will be his hope, joy, and crown; those in whom he will glory (take pride). This is not the glory that is attributed to God. This is not exclusive so that the Thessalonian church will be his glory and not the others he had taught.

"At his coming" (parousia) is literally "at his presence," but is metaphorically translated and understood as coming, not now present and then present again. This is the first use of the word in the book. The significance of the word will be developed in the study of Chapter 4.

## **BIBLE STUDY GUIDES: SEEKING THE ORIGINAL AUTHOR'S INTENT**

### **1 Thessalonians 3**

**By Bob Young**

[Note: it is suggested that the introductory materials concerning paragraphing be reread before beginning your own preparatory reading and analysis.]

#### **CONTENT**

Reminder: the student is encouraged to read the text several times before beginning the detailed study, and to identify the paragraphs based on those readings.

3:1-5, Paul's concern for the Thessalonian church (continued from 2:17-20)

3:6-10, Paul's response to Timothy's good report

3:11-13, Paul's prayer concerning the Thessalonian church

#### **STUDY HELPS**

3:1-5. Paul describes his concern and the decision to send Timothy to verify the situation in the church in Thessalonica. This occurred while Paul was in Athens (Acts 17). The plural first person, we, may be an editorial we, or may suggest that the team agreed together on the plan. In Acts 18:5, we learn that both Silas and Timothy went to Macedonia so that Paul was left alone in Athens. The Bible does not give more details concerning this matter. Paul's words as he describes the decision suggest that he had reached a "breaking point." He had no rest since he did not know how the Thessalonians were faring. Again we see the heart of the missionary. The word he uses in the translation, "to be left behind," may reflect another family or parental metaphor.

Paul's description of Timothy shows that he was sending someone that he considered his own representative, and someone who was very capable in sharing and defending the gospel. The use of the word gospel provides an interesting counterpoint which we will note later in this chapter. His purpose in sending Timothy was to confirm (strengthen) the faith of the Thessalonians and to encourage (exhort, console) them, so they would not be disturbed by the opposition they were enduring.

3:3-4. Paul reminds the church that persecution was expected as part of God's plan, a concept he applied to himself in 2:2,15 and to the Thessalonians in 2:14, and something he had told them about repeatedly.

3:5. This is a repetition or summary of 3:1-2, with the added detail that he was fearful concerning their faith (faithfulness), afraid that Satan had tempted them to leave the faith and that his work would have been in vain (2:1).

3:6-7. The news that Timothy brought is described as "good news" and the word for gospel is used. This is the only use of this word in the New Testament to describe news other than the good news of the gospel. Timothy was indeed a laborer in good news (3:2)!

The good news that Timothy brought concerned their faith and love, perhaps harkening back to 1:3. Love can be toward God or toward one another. Based on 3:12, the latter may be

preferable. They were supporting and caring for one another. Paul also considered it good news that the Thessalonian church members wanted to see Paul just as Paul wanted to see the Thessalonians. This shows that the relationship was firmly in place and that the accusations (of false motives and methods) that had been leveled against Paul by the opponents had not turned the church against Paul.

Just as the Thessalonians were experiencing affliction, Paul had also suffered rejection and difficulties in Athens and in Corinth. In the face of such afflictions, the word that Timothy brought was comforting (v. 7, another occurrence of the verb *parakaleo* in the context).

3:8. Now we are really alive is a metaphorically way to express his relief. He was relieved that they were standing firm and in the hope that they would stand firm.

3:9-10. The rhetorical question provides a segue to the prayer than concludes the chapter (and the first part of the letter). “What thanksgiving can we turn to God for you, for all the joy that we feel for your sake before our God, as we pray most earnestly night and day that we may see you face to face and supply what is lacking in your faith?” (ESV) Note the repeated reference to Paul’s constant, persistent, earnest prayer for them.

The reference to what is lacking in faith may be a way to foreshadow the questions about the coming of Jesus, to which Paul will shortly turn in the last half of Chapter 4. The subjects Paul addresses in 4:1-12 could also be included in “what is lacking.”

3:11-13. These verses are one sentence in Greek, with three verbs in the optative mood (direct, increase, abound). The optative mood is rare in the New Testament, but is normal here since it is the potential mood, common in prayers. Paul prays that God the Father will help clear the way for Paul’s visit to them. For the Thessalonians, he prays for increasing and abounding love, for one another and for all people.

The goal of the prayer is that they will have a strong heart commitment, being blameless and holy, at Jesus’ coming. Here again at the conclusion of the chapter, we find a reference to the coming of Jesus. As noted earlier, that each chapter of the letter concludes with a reference to the coming is a characteristic of this first letter.

## **BIBLE STUDY GUIDES: SEEKING THE ORIGINAL AUTHOR'S INTENT**

### **1 Thessalonians 4**

**By Bob Young**

[Note: it is suggested that the student reread the introductory materials about paragraphing before beginning preparatory reading and analysis.]

#### **CONTENT**

In the principal modern translations, there is general agreement concerning the division of this chapter into paragraphs. How would you describe the paragraphs? What headings would you use?

4:1-8, living a pure life pleasing to God (introductory remarks and sexual purity)

4:9-12, living an orderly life

1:13-18, the coming of the Lord (continues in 5:1-11)

#### **STUDY HELPS**

4:1-8. Finally, literally “as to the rest.” This is more transition than conclusion. We have previously noted the repeated use of the vocative (term of address), “brothers.” These vocatives may be helpful in outlining the book as they often start a new subject. (This is especially apparent in the book of James.)

4:1. The verbs request and exhort may soften these instructions, which are repeated from earlier teaching when Paul was with them, instructions they are well aware of. The overall subject is how they should walk (live) and (in order to) please God. (To please God is omitted in some later manuscripts, but is to be included based on the evidence.) The specific subject is holiness or sanctification.

4:3-6. These verses are one sentence in Greek. God’s will is holy lifestyles and character. Justification and sanctification should not be separated, as occurs in the doctrine of some religious groups that limits sanctification to God’s work after salvation. Here holy living is defined as follows: to abstain (keep yourself) from fornication (all inappropriate sexual activity), to know how to control (literally, acquire, take possession of) your own “vessel” in holiness and honor rather than in inordinate passion like the Gentiles, and not to overreach and deceive your brother in this “matter” since the Lord will avenge all things. In v. 7, the call the purity and sanctification (holiness) is repeated.

What is the meaning of vessel? The two principal options are one’s own body or one’s wife. What is the matter under consideration? The two principal options are with regard to sexual conduct, or with regard to business matters. Since the infinitive has the article before it, it is most likely a reference to vv. 3-5, which is also consistent with the context. It is hard to justify a change of subject. It is true that the word used is a business word, but may serve as a euphemism here to soften the language. Finally, brother may relate to other believers or could refer to humanity in general. My preference, as reflected below is a reference to other believers.

How shall we understand these verses? God's desire is holiness. Holiness must be part of one's overall conduct in the world (keeping oneself away from fornication), must be part of the marital relationship, and must be reflected in all relationships within the church, including how brotherly love (v. 9) is demonstrated in the church. There is no place for sexual liberties; such would be abuse or take advantage of a brother who is responsible for the well-being of his household. (Seen in this light, the concept of going out of bounds and defrauding or taking advantage of a brother makes sense.)

As Paul had previously taught, the Lord avenges all these things justly. Sanctification has always been the message; it has always been God's will as is reflected in his calling; to reject this teaching is to reject God, and by extension to reject the Holy Spirit that God gives to the believer.

4:9-12. Paul now turns to orderly living, especially regarding interpersonal relationships. Brother love is not new, the church does not more written instructions, they have been taught this principle by God (probably through God's messengers), and they are practicing it toward one another and toward all the brothers in Macedonia. Nonetheless, it would be good to grow and excel in love.

The orderly life (vv. 11-12) also includes living in tranquility, attending to your own business, working (a command Paul had given; see also the example of Paul in 2:9), behaving properly toward non-Christians, and not needing others to rescue. Working with your hands reminds of Paul's example cited above, and also of those who quit working in anticipation of Christ's return (2 Thess. 2:1-4; 3:6-15). The instructions of vv. 11-12 give an interesting insight and alternative to the interpretation of v. 6 as set forth above. By failing to work and provide for oneself and one's family, relying on the brethren could be seen as taking advantage and defrauding in a financial matter. Further the word for defraud is related to greed.

4:13-18. This section extends into Chapter 5 (5:1-11), but in this study we will honor the chapter division and include here only the Study Helps for 4:13-18.

Timothy had likely shared some questions from Thessalonica, or perhaps he had reported misunderstandings and doubts. Certainty concerning the truth gives stability to faith. Paul writes to inform them (I do not want you to be uninformed) so that they will have hope and will not be sorrowful as many are at the death of loved ones. The primary motivating question for this section appears to be, "What will happen to believers who die before Jesus comes?" The early church, including Paul, believed in the imminent return of Jesus. In 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15 we learn that some had quit their jobs to wait for Jesus' coming. The Maranatha prayer was common: Come, Lord Jesus! Christians were looking forward to seeing and participating in Jesus' return. But as time passes—in the case of the Thessalonians it was only a brief time—life continues and loved ones die. What will happen to these? A second concern of Paul was that with the passing of time, anticipation waned, and some Christians were lax concerning the Christian life. These two matters are good reason to make certain we understand correctly the teachings of this section. These are important questions for the contemporary church. What will happen when Jesus returns? How can we encourage Christians who have become lax in the Christian walk?

“Those who have fallen asleep” is a euphemistic way of referring to those who have died (Matt. 27:52; John 11:11-13; Acts 7:60; 1 Cor. 7:39, 11:30, 15:18; 2 Pet. 3:4). From the perspective of this world, it may appear that the dead are merely sleeping, but biblically we understand that they are alive, conscious, and awaiting the Last Day. Almost universally in my experience, Christians wish the Bible gave more details and clearer teaching about the state of the dead between death and the last resurrection day when both good and bad will be resurrected (John 5:28-29). Grieving at the death of a loved one may be normal as one thinks of separation and unfulfilled hopes and dreams. Paul does not say that Christians will not grieve, only that we will not grieve as others do. In the face of physical death, Christians have hope because of the gospel: Jesus died, Jesus was resurrected, God will bring with Jesus at his coming those who have died in him. The first class condition of v. 14 makes this certain.

Paul’s point is that since God had the power to resurrect Jesus from the dead, he has the same power for believers. (1 Corinthians 15 gives more detail about the resurrection. Resurrected Christians will receive new celestial bodies.) The text here affirms that he is coming back to be joined with Christians still living, and that those who have died are already with him. The phrase, will bring with him, troubles some. Since those who die are placed in tombs here on earth, our sense is that they are already here. The Bible says that their natural, physical bodies are in the natural, physical realm although decaying or decayed, but that they are in the spiritual realm. Thus, they also will come (God will bring them) when Jesus comes, or God will also lead them away when Jesus comes. The Greek verb, ago, has semantic breadth that allows alternate translations (will bring, will lead, will lead away).

4:15-16. Here is the word of the Lord. This is not merely Paul’s opinion. Those who are alive, that is, those who remain until the coming of the Lord, will not go ahead or have any advantage over those who have died. (The use of “we” may reflect Paul’s expectation of the imminent return of Jesus, or it may be an editorial we.)

The question Paul is addressing concerns believers, not unbelievers. This text does not say that unbelievers will not experience the same resurrection at the same time. This text says nothing about unbelievers. This text only addresses the situation of believers, apparently the question of the Thessalonians. Other Bible teaching makes clear that there will be one general resurrection of both the good and the bad, and that all appear together before God.

Those who have died before Jesus’ coming will fully participate in the coming. What will happen? The Lord will return personally, descending from heaven. Jesus promised that he would return (John 14:1-3). He will return with a commanding shout, an archangel’s voice, and the sound of God’s trumpet. The coming will not be secret (Rev. 1:7). No one will miss the command of the Lord, perhaps the same command he spoke to Lazarus, “Come forth.” (John 11:43) Trumpets functioned as announcements and as warnings. Trumpets are mentioned in the context of resurrection in 1 Cor. 15:52.

4:17-18. Paul continues his answer to the question. At the coming of Jesus, those who have died in Christ (v. 14) will be resurrected first (before anything happens to the believers who remain). This terminology does not deny v. 14, that God will bring them or lead them. The first thing that will happen is that the bodies of those who have died in Christ will be resurrected

(compare again 1 Corinthians 15:35-57). Next, those who remain (are yet living) will be snatched up.

This verb, *harpazo*, which I have translated snatched, is where the concept of rapture originates. The verb has limited use in the New Testament (Matt. 11:12, 12:29, 13:19; John 6:15, 10:12,28,29; Acts 8:39, 23:10; 2 Cor. 12:2,4; Phil. 2:6; 1 Thess.4:17; Jude 23, Rev. 12:5). The root has three basic meanings: something done with much force, something done for oneself or own benefit (see Phil. 2:6 for an example), and something that occurs rapidly and unexpectedly. The context of 1 Thess. 4:17 suggests that the latter meaning is the best translation.

Based on biblical teachings, it is hard to understand how the events described could occur in secret. Further, it is hard to understand how the unbelievers could be excluded. The situation, as noted earlier, is that Paul is not addressing the question of what will happen to unbelievers at Jesus' coming.

Believers will meet the Lord in the air and go with him to be with him forever. The text suggests that Jesus does not return to the earth. Together signifies both those who have died and those who remain alive. The church had questions about details of Jesus' return. The second letter will pick up additional questions. With this reference to the coming of Jesus at the end of Chapter 4, we see the pattern continued—a reference to the coming of Jesus appears at the end of every chapter in 1 Thessalonians. These were words of comfort for the Thessalonians.

This is not the place to address millennial questions since nothing is said of the 1000 years in the text. I close with a quotation from George E. Ladd, "I admit that the greatest difficulty to any pre-millennialism is the fact that most of the New Testament pictures the consummation as occurring at Jesus' parousia" (in Robert G. Clouse, *The Meaning of the Millennium*, pp. 189-190). That is certainly Paul's message in this text.

## **BIBLE STUDY GUIDES: SEEKING THE ORIGINAL AUTHOR'S INTENT**

### **1 Thessalonians 5**

**By Bob Young**

[Note: it is suggested that the student reread the introductory materials about paragraphing (p. 2 of this guide) before beginning to read, analyze, and study a new chapter of the biblical text.]

#### **CONTENT**

5:1-11, the coming of the Lord (continued from 4:13-18)

5:12-22, various exhortations (with 15 present imperatives)

5:23-24, closing prayer

5:25-29, salutation and blessing

#### **STUDY HELPS**

5:1-11. The continuation of Paul's discussion of the coming of Jesus helps correct some of the misunderstandings and questions, especially with reference to what will happen to unbelievers when Jesus returns. "Brothers" marks the transition to a new section (but not a new topic in this case).

Paul does not need to say more about the times (chronos) and seasons (kairos) beyond what he had written in 4:13-18. The day of the Lord is an Old Testament phrase that referred at times to a day of judgment and at other times to a day of blessing. In this text, it refers to a single day of blessing on the faithful and judgment on the unbelievers. This is the same as the day referenced in 1 Thess. 4:13-18, a day when all humans will meet Jesus.

The day will come unexpectedly (parallel to Greek word *harpazo*, snatched) in 4:17. (See discussion at 4:17 where the "unexpected" dimension of the word is explained.) The day will come at a most unexpected moment and destruction will be immediate. Note the contrast between the unbelievers (v. 3) and the believers (v. 4), referring to the same event and same day. Paul describes the judgment as labor pains, also emphasizing the suddenness, and as inescapable.

The believers do not have to be surprised, because Paul has taught them (1) what will occur, and (2) that they should remain ready. Paul describes this contrast in terms of light and darkness, day and night. Sons of light and sons of day are idioms for the righteous, participating in the nature of light. Let us not sleep (v. 6) is a different word than that used in 4:13-14. As Paul makes clear, the meaning of the phrase is "let us be alert and sober."

5:8-11. The believer is prepared for Jesus' coming by being equipped with the armor of faith, love and hope (compare 1:3). The result is salvation through the Lord Jesus Christ. The gospel is again summarized: he died for us so that we might live with him, both those who have died and those who remain alive. The thought in v. 10 certainly points back to 4:13ff, suggesting that these verses are an expansion of the same thought. Verse 11 is parallel to 4:18: encourage and edify one another with these words, as you are doing.

5:12-22. “Brothers” signifies another transition. Apparently this young church had a developed, organized leadership at this early stage. The discussion of the date of the letter (see introduction) places it within a year or less of the first visit of the missionary team. The early establishment of leaders also characterized the churches established on the first missionary journey (Acts 14:21-23). The church is exhorted to recognize (respect) those who labor within the church (among you). The word for labor is more intensive than work. These leaders are “set before you” (literal translation) and they “put sense into you” (literal translation, often translated admonish). These are those in charge (those who preside). That they are responsible for instructing and admonishing suggests spiritual wisdom. These verbs describe important aspects of biblical leadership.

In this section (5:12-22) are fifteen imperatives that give instructions about how to live. Concerning leaders, have respect for them because of their work.

Live in peace.

Warn the idle (non-workers?).

Encourage the discouraged.

Help the weak.

Be patient with everyone.

Do not repay evil with evil.

Pursue what is good for one another and for everyone.

Rejoice always.

Pray without ceasing.

Give thanks in everything as is God’s will, even in persecution.

Do not restrain the Spirit.

Do not treat prophecies with contempt, [but]

Examine everything (prove all things).

Hold on to what is good.

Abstain from every form of evil.

5:23-24. These verses are Paul’s closing prayer. He began the letter with grace and peace. He closes with a reference to the God of peace. God is the one who sanctifies (4:1-8). The description of human beings as spirit, soul, and body is unique. Soul and spirit are often used as synonyms. There are finer shades of meaning in these words, especially in the Old Testament: body is the physical being, soul is the breath of life, and spirit is the eternal aspect. In the New Testament soul and spirit are often subsumed into the same concept. God not only sanctifies, he preserves. Paul’s prayer is for the sanctification, preservation, and blamelessness of the Thessalonians at the Lord’s coming. Note again the reference to the coming at the end of this chapter.

God is faithful to answer Paul’s prayer and to do what Paul has described concerning the return of Jesus.

5:25. As Paul has prayed for the Thessalonians, he requests their prayers also on his behalf. This is common in Paul’s letters (Eph. 6:18-19; Col. 4:3-4).

5:26-27. The holy kiss was a sign of love and community. The letter was to be read to the entire church. Paul's letters were intended for public reading.

5:28. In the final verse, Paul may have written by hand to authenticate the letter (compare 2 Thess. 3:12-18). As he began with grace and peace (1:1-2), so also he ends the letter (5:23,28).

## **BIBLE STUDY GUIDES: SEEKING THE ORIGINAL AUTHOR'S INTENT**

### **2 Thessalonians 1**

**By Bob Young**

[Note: it is suggested that the introductory materials concerning paragraphing (at the beginning of this guide) be read before beginning your own preparatory reading and analysis.]

#### **CONTENT**

There is general agreement about the division of this chapter into paragraphs.

1:1-2, greeting or salutation

[1:3-4, thanksgiving]

1:3-12, judgment at Christ's coming

#### **STUDY HELPS**

The letter of 2 Thessalonians seems to have as a primary purpose the development and explanation of the eschatological themes that were introduced in 1 Thessalonians.

1:1-2. Paul, originally Saul, first called Paul in Acts 13:9, appears without any additional description (apostle, servant, etc.). Silvanus (Silas) traveled with Paul on the second missionary journey (Acts 15:22-23, 40; 16:19ff) and was also included in the salutation of the first letter. Timothy, likewise, was included in the salutation of the first letter. The salutation is as expected in the Greek letter form: authors, recipients, greetings.

1:3-12. As indicated in the content outline, some outlines separate vv. 3-4 as a separate thanksgiving. I prefer to consider these verses as a single paragraph since vv. 3-10 are one sentence in Greek. The last two verses of the chapter (vv. 11-12) are a summary of vv. 3-10.

1:3-4. Paul was thankful because of the growing faith and increasing love of the Christians in Thessalonica. Apparently he had received additional correspondence from them that included an update on their situation and an additional question or concern (2 Thess. 2:1-4). The Christian community was being supportive of its members; Paul wished that love would grow even more. The Thessalonian church was a source of pride for Paul and his coworkers (2 Thess. 1:4, compare also 1 Thess. 2:17-20). Paul mentions their perseverance and faith in the midst of the persecutions and tribulations they were enduring.

1:5. The persecutions demonstrated God's just judgment. This is an interesting statement. God will judge unbelievers justly. The Thessalonians have become believers and are now being judged unjustly (by their opponents), but they will receive God's just judgment, and as a result they will be counted worthy of the kingdom for which they are suffering. This indicates Paul's understanding of the "already" nature of the kingdom in the first century, even though there is also a "not yet" element.

1:6-10. The first class conditional statement is assumed to be true. It is only right (just) that God will repay with tribulations those who are causing the Thessalonians to suffer tribulations,

and Paul also since he was suffering. In this world they are suffering tribulations, but when the Lord Jesus comes, they will have rest. The word used to describe this coming (revelation) of Jesus is apocalypsis. The New Testament uses three words to describe the coming of Jesus: parousia, presence; epiphania, appearing; apocalypsis, revelation.

This revelation of Jesus will be with mighty angels and flaming fire, indicating God's judgment. The judgment of God will come as retribution (vengeance, penalty) upon those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. Because God can be known, this is willful rejection of the knowledge of God and thus willful rejection of his will. Knowledge is not only cognitive, mental assent but refers to intimate relationship. There is no reason to identify two groups in v. 8, one without knowledge of God (Gentiles?) and another not obeying the gospel (Jews?). These will suffer the pain (penalty, same root as retribution in v. 8) of eternal destruction or separation from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his power.

This will happen when the Lord comes to be glorified by his saints. This can mean (1) that Jesus will receive glory from Christians, (2) that Jesus will be receive glory because the Christians have endured, or (3) that Jesus will be glorified in or among the Christians. In the New Testament, "saints" means "holy ones," a reference to those who are sanctified, thus Christians. When Jesus comes on that day (the same day as 1 Thessalonians chapters 4 and 5), he will be admired by all believers including the Thessalonians who had believed the testimony of the missionaries.

1:11-12. Paul again mentions his constant prayer for the church, along with specific content of the prayers. He prayed that God would count them worthy of the life he called them to live, that he would complete his purpose of goodness and every work of faith by his power. The result will be that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ will be glorified in them, and they in Him, according to grace.

## **BIBLE STUDY GUIDES: SEEKING THE ORIGINAL AUTHOR'S INTENT**

### **2 Thessalonians 2**

**By Bob Young**

[Note: it is suggested that the introductory page concerning paragraphing be read before beginning your own preparatory reading and analysis.]

#### **CONTENT**

There is general agreement about the division of this chapter into paragraphs.

2:1-4, the question about the coming of the Day of the Lord

2:5-12, the apostasy and the lawlessness

2:13-17, stand firm

#### **STUDY HELPS**

##### Chapter Introduced

Especially in this chapter, it is clear that the letter of 2 Thessalonians has as a primary purpose the development and explanation of the eschatological themes that were introduced in the letter of 1 Thessalonians.

Although this chapter is not easy, a careful study and analysis yields a basic understanding of Paul's message even when every detail is not certain. The Thessalonians undoubtedly understood what Paul was saying because they were familiar with the teachings he references. Let us be reminded that the text cannot say and mean today what it did not say and mean for the original author and recipients. That is, the original meaning must guide our understanding today. Further, the books of Thessalonians and especially this chapter have some of the characteristics of apocalyptic language, suggesting that we should think in symbols and figures.

This chapter deals with a specific question related to the coming of the Lord (the coming of the Day of the Lord). Some were teaching that the coming had already occurred. Paul speaks to what is currently happening, what must happen before that day comes, and what will happen when that day comes. Some see the antichrist in this chapter, but Paul does not use that description. In fact, the Bible speaks of many antichrists rather than only one (1 John 2:18-19). There is no justification for inserting into the text things that are not divinely inspired, and the Bible never makes the identification of the lawless one as an antichrist. This is why I do not use the phrase "second coming." It is not a biblical phrase.

2:1-4. This chapter expands Paul's teachings in chapters 4 and 5 of the first letter. Paul uses the word parousia, just as in the first letter. Not only does Paul use parousia to suggest Christ's return, he speaks of our gathering to him, in parallel to 1 Thess. 4:13-18. The context speaks of one coming, not two, and thus stands in conflict with traditional pre-tribulational, premillennial theory. "Concerning the coming of Jesus and our being gathered to him" combines the two ideas and suggests a continuation from the subject of 1 Thessalonians 4 and 5. The idea that other comings of Jesus could be in view thus seems unlikely.

Paul urges that the Thessalonians not be easily moved from their previous thinking about the return of Christ (1 Thess. 5:1-2), and that they not be disturbed, whether by spirit (prophetic teaching), message, or letter claiming to be from Paul. The content of the false teaching, whether by prophecy, message, or letter, was that the day of the Lord had already come. For other NT uses of the phrase “day of the Lord,” see Acts 2:20 (quotation from Joel); 1 Cor. 5:5, 2 Cor. 1:14, 2 Pet 3:1,10. All other New Testament uses are in Thessalonian correspondence: 1 Thess. 5:1, 2; 2 Thess. 2:2. Our study of the phrase must begin with the Old Testament use of phrase, especially in the prophets. Two options are possible: (1) a day of judgment or a day of blessing within history, and (2) end of time.

2:3. Do not be deceived. The “day” cannot come until the rebellion (apostasy) comes first, and the man of lawlessness (of sin) “is revealed,” described as “the son of destruction” (having a destroying nature, one who brings destruction, used of Judas Iscariot in John 17:12). The phrase means “destined for destruction.”

Two events are mentioned: an apostasy and the revealing of the man of lawlessness (literally, unless should come the apostasy first and unless should be revealed the man of lawlessness). To describe the apostasy here as “great” is to go beyond what the text says. Apostasy is rebellion, literally to stand away from. Apostasies are mentioned in 1 Timothy 4 and 2 Timothy 3. The man of lawlessness will be revealed (apocalypsis, the normal word for revelation). The idea of “revelation” is not to be confused with “appearing.” To know the identity of someone is different than affirming that the person has appeared or is present. There is a variant in the Greek manuscripts concerning “lawlessness” or “sin”. The reading of “lawlessness” is almost certain.

The use of “man” (anthropos) leads us to think of a specific individual. In v. 6, “he” will be revealed (can be personal or impersonal). In v. 7 we have the mystery of lawlessness already working, and in v. 8, the text says will be revealed (parallel verb, as in v. 3) the lawless one (a more impersonal construction). This will be explored further in the comments and expansion of vv. 7-8.

The idea of revealing is used in the NT of Jesus’ future coming. Connecting revelation and coming is possible, but it is also possible that presence could precede the revelation. The construction here does not necessarily mean that the “man of lawlessness” is not already present. See my comments in v. 8, and the use of parousia in v. 9 describing the lawless one. The next verse (2:4) uses present tense to describe already occurring activities of this person. Summary of the verse 3: two conditions must precede the coming of “the day”.

2:4. This verse begins with a description of the man of lawlessness. He is not Satan; his revelation is a work of Satan (v. 9). Based on the wording of the text, he is not identified as antichrist. Some have suggested he should be identified with the Jewish apocalyptic “worthless one” who was a false Messiah. He is man of lawlessness, son of destruction, (present tense) an opponent who places himself in an adversarial position, he opposes (sets himself against) and exalts himself above everything that is called god or considered to be an object of worship, so that he would seat himself in God’s temple, this setting himself forth as God. He will be judged and destroyed even though he appears to be divine.

“Temple of God” may be a literal reference to the temple in Jerusalem which was still standing at the date of the Thessalonian correspondence. It may be a figurative reference to the church, although it is hard to understand the figure. It could be taken as a reference to heaven. It may be a figurative reference to God’s spiritual throne, simply indicating the desire of the lawless one to usurp the throne. This concept of usurping the throne also appears with reference to Rome (Rev. 12-13). The word “temple” was also used for pagan temples where deities were enthroned. The Greek temples had thrones, the other options did not. But a figurative, apocalyptic use does not depend on literal parallelism. The best option is figurative (we are dealing with apocalyptic literature) so that he would take the place of God, claiming to be God.

The best interpretive grid suggests that these verses had meaning to the Thessalonians. Parallel events from the same time period would include Caligula putting a statue of himself in the Jerusalem temple (about 10 years before this letter was written), the fall of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, and the reigns of terror and persecution unleashed by Nero and Domitian. What was the meaning for the Thessalonians? A lawless person (embodying lawlessness) would come before the Day of the Lord could come.

2:5-6. Paul had shared these things when he was with them. As previously noted, the Thessalonians had an orientation that we do not have today. Notice the phrases, do you not remember (v. 5) and you know (v. 6).

At the present time (now, referring to the time of Paul’s writing) something is “holding back” (restraining). There is no direct object to the verb to say that the lawless man (lawless one, lawlessness) is being restrained. In the context of the verse, what is being restrained is the revealing. Literally, the verse reads, “And now you know the restraining thing unto (until) his revealing in his own time.” Remember my comment earlier than revealing and appearing or presence are not necessarily simultaneous. As a result of Paul’s teachings (v. 5), the Thessalonians understood what Paul was saying.

Holding back, *katecho*, appears in vv. 6 and 7. For other uses of the Greek word in the NT, see Lk 4:42; 8:15; 14:9; Jn 5:4; Ac 27:40; Rom 1:18; 7:6; 1 Cor 7:30; 11:2; 15:2; 2 Cor 6:10; 1 Th 5:21; Philm 13; Heb 3:6,14; 10:23. In the context, restrain seems a good translation. The restraining is temporary, and the revelation will come “in his/its time” (in the future). The restraint is focused on the fact that the revelation has not yet occurred, and that it must occur before the coming of the day of the Lord.

The question is: what is the restraining thing? We will notice a grammatical change from neuter (vv. 6-7) to masculine (vv. 7-8). This likely implies personification, that is, we are not seeking a specific individual. Traditional interpretations of the restraining power are the Roman Empire, a certain Roman emperor, and the preaching of the gospel or the Holy Spirit. The restraining power is a reality at the time of the writing of the letter. The restraining thing is under God’s control and is part of God’s plan (vv. 6-7). At the right future time, the restraining thing will be removed (taken out of the midst) and the revelation will occur.

2:7. The mystery of lawless is already at work. Even before the revelation of the man of lawlessness (vv. 3 and 4) lawlessness is at work. Lawlessness is not exclusively the result of the revelation of a

certain man (man of lawlessness). The one who is yet to be revealed in his [own] time will simply participate in and have the same nature as the lawlessness that already exists.

Mystery signifies something previously unknown but now revealed (or to be revealed in the future). NET translates this section: “the hidden power of lawlessness is already at work.” Lawlessness is present, but will be personified in the future in the coming one.

The restraining one (power) will continue restraining until he/it is (ginomai) out of the middle, no longer in the way. The “one” who restrains (v. 7) contrasts with the impersonal use in v. 6 (the thing that restrains). The restraint is described both as a force and as personal.

2:8. Then (after the previous things) the lawless one will be revealed. Remember that Paul’s point is that the day of the Lord cannot have already come, because there must first be rebellion (apostasy) and the revealing of the lawless one (lawless man, lawlessness).

The lawless one (lawless man, lawlessness) has not yet been revealed because there is a restraining force or person (although lawlessness is already at work in possibly hidden ways). This restraining force will eventually no longer be present, opening the way for the things described in v. 8.

Then the lawless one will be revealed, the one whom the Lord will destroy with the spirit of his mouth and annul with the appearance (epiphany) of his coming (parousia). The construction of the verse with appositive descriptive phrases does not require chronological connection. The events of vv. 8-9 do not have to be understood as sequential. The first part of the verse is future event; the second part of the verse is descriptive: “this is the one whom the Lord will destroy....” Literally the text reads, “this is the one the Lord will take away with the breath of his mouth and render powerless by the appearance of his coming.” Appearance is epiphania, coming is parousia. The last part of v. 8 can occur a long time after the first part of the verse since it is only descriptive, almost parenthetical. To resume v. 9 where v. 8a stopped would be normal with this kind of construction.

Considering that this is apocalyptic language, v. 8 (with the breath of his mouth) may remind us of Revelation 19 with power coming from the mouth. The power of spirit of the mouth could signify the gospel, or it could simply paint a vivid picture of death and destruction coming from the mouth of Jesus. The use of parousia seems to place the ultimate destruction at Jesus’ return.

2:9. The construction, “of whom the coming is according to the working of Satan....” shows that “of whom” points back to the lawless one. Again, this highlights the nature of the descriptive phrase in v. 8. A more literal translation of vv. 8 and 9 will demonstrate the exact construction: “then will be revealed the lawless one, (which the Lord will destroy by the spirit of his mouth and overthrow with the appearance of his coming,) of whom the coming is according to the working of Satan....”

In vv. 8 and 9, parousia is applied both to Jesus (v. 8) and to the lawless one (v. 9). Parousia is literally being alongside, sometimes translated presence, but thinking of the future presence of one not now present, it is understood as coming.

The work of the lawless one is according to Satan’s working (activity), capable of miracles and signs and false wonders. The lawless one will appear to do great things, but they will in fact be false. Miracles can be counterfeited.

2:10. These are all unrighteous deceptions “to those who are perishing, of whom the love of the truth was not received unto their salvation.” The text says those who are perishing are the ones deceived. Those deceived are those who did not accept the love of the truth, or refused to love the truth.

2:11. This working of deception or error is attributed to God. Because of this, that is because of their failure to love the truth (v. 12), God sends a deceptive working (unrighteous influence) so they believe

what is false. The plural refers to the same ones as v. 10. In this matter, God can be actively or passively involved, and still be in control of the events of the world.

The timing of vv. 7-11 must be noted. First consider this paraphrase: (7) Lawlessness is at work in the time of the Thessalonians, but the lawless one has not yet been revealed due to the presence of a restrainer; but when the restraining influence is no longer present, (8) the lawless one will be revealed. (This is one who the Lord will destroy and overthrow at his coming.) (9) The coming of the lawless one is by Satan's working and (10) evil deception against those who are perishing. Some perish because they did not receive a love for the truth that would result in their salvation. (11) Therefore [in the coming of the lawless one] God sends on them a deluding influence so they believe falsehood. (12) The result will be that all who have not believed truth but have delighted in evil will be judged [condemned].

The verses say nothing about the timing of the event described, only that they are future. There may be some more immediate anticipation of the revelation of the lawless one. Perhaps the revelation of the lawless one and his presence as one who does Satan's works will lead to apostasy or rebellion. This places a first-last-last-first construction on v. 3. Before the day of the Lord, rebellion must come and the revelation of the lawless one must occur. The revelation of the lawless one will be like this, with the result that the rebellion will follow.

2:12. This result comes from the deception, the lack of love for truth, the delusion, believing what is false and enjoying evil, so that condemnation follows. They will all be judged or condemned.

Whoever the man of lawlessness is, his influence and impact must appear in deceptions associated with Satan, and be able to influence people away from truth (without love for truth) so they will not be saved. The presence of an influence that deludes or deceives causes people to believe falsehoods. Because they do not believe truth but delight in evil, they will be condemned. The context does not apply this to those who have been Christians but are afterward influenced, but the connection of rebellion and revealing the man of lawlessness in v. 3, as explained in 2:11 comments above, might suggest an application to first-century Christians.

#### Summary of Chapter 2:1-12

The Thessalonians can know that the day of the Lord has not yet come because the rebellion and lawlessness Paul had taught them about had not occurred.

For the Thessalonians, it seems Paul had warned them about a specific individual or the presence of a lawless force, which would lead to rebellion or apostasy. For us today, it is difficult to identify that individual or influence that existed in the first century. The lesson for us is more likely that lawlessness is always at work, sometimes stronger and sometimes weaker as a result of other restraining factors in our culture and world. When restraints are removed, lawlessness increases.

The specific situation Paul mentions is still future, but when it occurs it will demonstrate the power of lawlessness as a force, or the power of some specific individual or influence toward lawlessness, that will be destroyed and overthrown at Jesus' coming. (The day of the Lord has not come; Jesus has not arrived, because there has not been rebellion and the revelation of the lawless one.) The lawless one will be revealed and will be destroyed at Jesus' coming (which has not yet occurred).

2:13-17. Paul again mentions constant prayer (always), thanking God for the salvation of the Thessalonians who are beloved by God. Notice the references—God, Lord, Spirit. The Thessalonian church is the firstfruits, through sanctification by the Spirit and their belief (faith) in the truth. This description highlights the two-fold dimension of salvation—God's work and human response. God's work among the Thessalonians is placed in stark contrast to the description of 2:11-12, those who do not believe because they do not love the truth. The work of God described in v. 13 is consistent with the

calling of God and results in glory for the believers (see 2 Thess. 1:11-12). God's calls human beings to him through the truth of the gospel.

2:15-17. "Brothers" introduces the summary. Christians must stand firm (persevere) and hold the traditions (that which has been passed down) of Paul's teachings. The chapter closes with a prayer. Paul's prayer is that Jesus Christ, and God the Father who loved us and gave us eternal comfort and good hope, will comfort (encourage) the hearts of the Thessalonians and establish them in every good work and word. The comfort and hope received from Christ and the Father will encourage and establish the Thessalonians.

## **BIBLE STUDY GUIDES: SEEKING THE ORIGINAL AUTHOR'S INTENT**

### **2 Thessalonians 3**

**By Bob Young**

[Note: it is suggested that the introductory materials concerning paragraphing be read before beginning your own preparatory reading and analysis.]

#### **CONTENT**

3:1-5, An appeal to pray for us, even as we pray for your perseverance

3:6-15, warning against idleness and disunity

3:16-18, final words

#### **STUDY HELPS**

The two principal sections of the chapter speak of Paul's desire to continue preaching the gospel with God's blessing, and give a warning about the actions that stem from misunderstandings about Jesus' coming.

3:1-5. "Finally" is "for the rest." This is transitional, but in this case marks the beginning of the conclusion. Paul's first request is this: pray for us that the gospel will spread and be glorified (see 2 Thess. 1:11-12 on glory). A second request is for protection and rescue from evil men. Not all are willing to receive the truth of the gospel (2 Thess. 2:11-12). Our faithful God will strengthen you and protect you from evil (either neuter or masculine), possibly the evil one (Satan) but in the context, from all kinds of evil, including the false teachers and those who do evil because they reject the truth.

Paul is confident in the Lord that the Thessalonians are doing and will keep on doing the things commanded (teachings, the things passed down = traditions). He prays for them, that the Lord will guide them into greater love and steadfastness, even as he has asked them to pray for him.

3:6-15. Paul now turns to the second topic of this chapter, warnings concerning the actions of some of the brothers at Thessalonica. Paul commands that they keep away from idle (lazy, not working) brothers who do not keep the teachings (traditions) received from Paul. Idle is "disorderly conduct." The context appears to be that some believers, in anticipation of the immediate return of Jesus had ceased working. Probably they expected to be supported by the other Christians. Different understandings often lead to disagreements and an uncooperative, disorderly spirit. Paul urges all to honor the teaching he has passed on to them (what they received).

In vv. 7-9, Paul reminds of his example when he was among them, how he worked and did not depend on others, how he paid when he received from others, and how he kept on working night and day in the midst of much labor and hardship. He has the right to do otherwise, but did not use it. And even during his presence with them, he gave the same order, "that those who would not work should not eat." This was apparently not a new problem.

3:11-12. This text uses a word play on the Greek word “work.” ESV captures the thought like this: “We hear that some among you walk in idleness, not busy at work, but busybodies.” Using the concept of “busy at work” one could translate: “We hear that some are not busy working, but are busybodies, interfering with everyone else’s busy-ness.” Paul’s response was to command and exhort in the Lord that all work quietly and earn their own living. “Quiet” is parallel to 1 Thess. 4:11.

3:13-15. Do not grow weary of doing good is similar to Gal. 6:9. People watch how we live. If someone in the church will not obey the command (v. 12), that person should be identified (noted, tagged, marked) and avoided (as in v. 6), so he will be ashamed. This appears to be a complete disfellowship as in 1 Cor. 5. The same word is used (only here and in 1 Cor. 5). The goal of church discipline is to correct (discipline) and restore.

3:16-18. In verse 16 is a closing prayer. As Paul opened and closed the first letter with salutations that mentioned peace, so also in the second letter: the God of peace. The closing verses of the two Thessalonian letters are similar. May the God of peace grant you peace. In verse 17, Paul affirms with his own hand his authorship. Paul dictated his letters to an amanuensis (scribe, secretary), but included a final section with his own hand. In verse 18, Paul mentions grace, in the same way that he began the letter. The plural (all of you) indicates that the letter was intended for the entire church.