

Mount Pisgah A.M.E. Church

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Bible Study, Wednesday, January 6, 2016

Survey of the Bible

Lesson 55: 2 Thessalonians

The Book of 2 Thessalonians

The book of 2 Thessalonians is a second letter written to one of the beloved early churches of the first century, the church of Thessalonica to counteract some seeds of false teaching that have been spread among the disciples there. The false teaching is affecting how believers in Thessalonica are perceiving their current situation, and consequently, how they are behaving in light of it. The author hopes to replace those weeds of falsehood with seeds of truth in an attempt to change belief and behavior.

Author

There is at least as much external evidence that Paul wrote 2 Thessalonians as there is that he wrote 1 Thessalonians. Ancient writings quote the letter by name and early scholars attribute it to Paul. Internally, the autographs (1:1, 3:17) indicate Paul's authorship, as well as the "pastoral" tone of the letter that indicates a close relationship with the people there.

The Times and context of 2 Thessalonians

As the outline of 1 Thessalonians explains, Thessalonica was the capital city of the Roman region known as Macedonia, which is now northeastern Greece. Paul visited the city during his 2nd Missionary Journey, as he traveled through Macedonia. He was driven out of Thessalonica by opponents to his message, and pursued through Berea, Athens, and finally to Corinth. While in Corinth he became concerned that opponents to his message was poisoning the minds of the converts in Thessalonica and undermining his work there. Thus, he wrote 1 Thessalonians and sent it via Timothy.

The epistle of 2 Thessalonians seems to have been written soon after 1 Thessalonians. Some scholars believe it may have been in response to Timothy's report from when he delivered the first letter. However this seems unlikely, since the *immediate* response to Paul's first letter would have been to clarify rather than further confuse their understanding. Thus it seems that *some* time, perhaps a year or so must have passed. Paul may have received *another* report from one of the other traveling disciples, prompting him to write this letter.

Overview

This letter is a sequel to 1 Thessalonians, which further develops the theme of the coming "Day of the Lord." After a while they seem to have fallen prey to the false notion that the "Day of the Lord" (the era of tribulation and judgment that would accompany Jesus' return) had already begun. Some had come to believe this because of the level of persecution that they were undergoing. Paul writes this brief letter to correct the error and also to encourage those believers whose faith is being tested by the difficulties presented by the persecution. He also chastises those who are using their misunderstanding as a reason or excuse for idleness and laziness because they believe the day of the Lord is near.

Paul begins with a word of encouragement for how the Thessalonians have held onto Christ through persecution. He then offers a word of correction by describing what must occur before the Day of The Lord comes, and encourages them to stand firm. Finally he gives a word of challenge to those who have

been using the truth of Christ's return as an excuse for "disorderly conduct," and concludes with a prayer of blessing.

Outline

- I. Encouragement in Persecution (1:1-1:12)**
 - A. Greeting (1:1-1:2)
 - B. Thanksgiving (1:3-1:4)
 - C. Assurance (1:5-1:10)
 - D. Prayer (1:11-1:12)
- II. Correction of Understanding (2:1-2:13)**
 - A. First Falling Away (2:1-2:3)
 - B. The Man of Lawlessness (2:4-2:5)
 - C. The Restrainer (2:6-2:7)
 - D. The Great Deception (2:8-2:12)
- III. Assurance and Prayer (2:13-3:5)**
 - A. Chosen to Stand (2:13-2:15)
 - B. Prayer for their Steadfastness (2:16-2:17)
 - C. Request for Prayer (3:1-3:5)
- IV. Challenge in Behavior (3:6-3:15)**
 - A. Withdraw from those who are Idle (3:6)
 - B. Personal Example (3:7-3:10)
 - C. Challenge to Remain active (3:11-3:15)
- V. Final Blessing and Autograph (3:16-3:18)**
 - A. Benediction (3:16, 3:18)
 - B. Autograph (3:17)

Some Keys to understanding The Book of 2 Thessalonians

- The Thessalonians were subject to all sorts of persecution, both by (a) Jews who believed that faith in Jesus as the Christ was idolatry and that it was also subversive to obedience to Rome and therefore dangerous, and (b) Jewish believers who believed Paul's interpretation of salvation by grace alone (without the requirement of following the Jewish law) undermined Jewish tradition. The believers in Thessalonica had very little to lean on for support other than Paul's teachings.
- The identity of "the lawless one" or the "son of perdition" has been variously understood over the years.

- The early Jews understood it to have been the Emperor Titus who destroyed Jerusalem and its temple in 70 AD
- Some Christians have thought that perhaps it was Adolf Hitler

The true identity of "the lawless one" is not clear, however some scholars identify him with "The Anti-Christ," a charismatic messenger of Satan mentioned in 1 John. What is clear is that he will:

- Bring glory to himself
 - Lead people into sin and temptation through deception
 - Desecrate sacred spaces.
- Paul warns against two extremes:
 - Stopping working (especially for God, but also to support oneself) because you believe that the return of Christ is near
 - Stopping working because you have become discouraged by all of the persecution that you decide it's not worth it.

Both extremes undermine the purposes of God for the Thessalonians.

Some Lessons from 2 Thessalonians

- In a day where faith is called “illogical” and “unreasonable,” we must hold on to our reasons for hope that are given to us through the teachings of God’s Word, in spite of the resistance that we come up against.
- It’s easy to lose hope during times that seem replete with hopelessness. However it is important that one see reality not with eyes on the immediate, but within the larger scope of what God is doing. God promises that persecutions and “lawlessness” will be dealt with, and that those who have been victimized by it will be vindicated **IN GOD’S TIME**.
- We must pray for believers all over the world that are experiencing persecution because of their faith. Persecution comes from many directions – both from “the religious” and “the unreligious.” We must pray **BOTH** that they don’t become discouraged, **AND** that they don’t become idle and unproductive.
- One of the criticisms of Christianity, particularly from those who are progressive, is that it encourages people to be “so heavenly minded that they are no earthly good.” 2 Thessalonians counteracts that misperception. We are to continue to work for God’s kingdom, regardless of the “signs” that we see that time is winding up. “For we know not the day nor the hour...”
- 2 Thessalonians gives an important testimony to how folks among us who are involved in unbiblical activities among us are to be treated. They are **NOT** to be “treated as enemies,” but rather “warned as brothers.” In other words, we “speak the truth in love” to them. The objective is not to injure them or “get them told,” but rather to restore them to right fellowship.