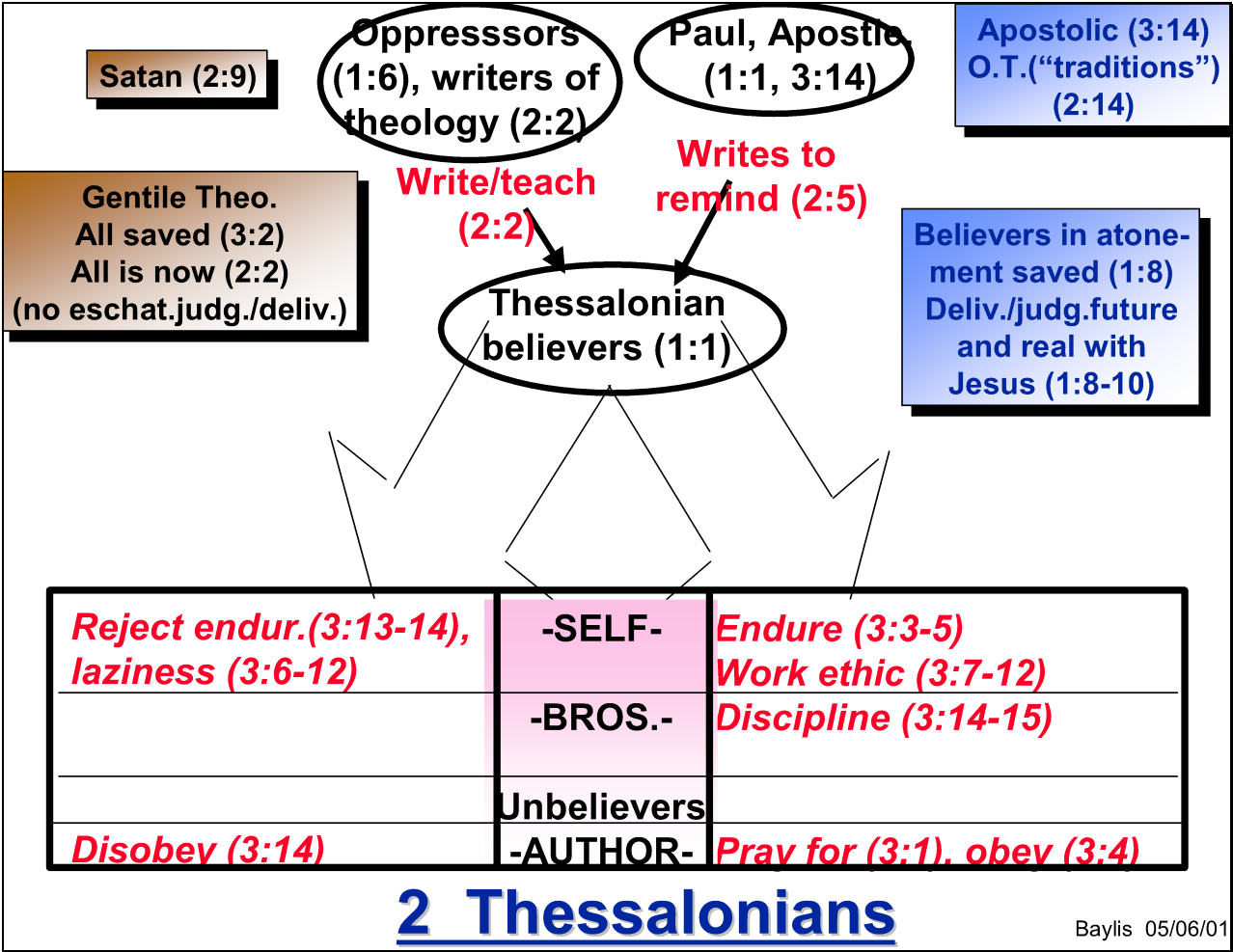


SECOND THESSALONIANS

**Real Judgment and Real Atonement
 “The Promise of Wrath/Escape”**



Literary Argument

- I. **Relationship:** Paul is the author, as well as Silvanus and Timothy, sending it to the church at Thessalonica, reminding them of the gift of salvation (“grace”), which has provided them escape from the wrath of God (“peace”) (1:1-2).

1:1 Paul and Silvanus and Timothy to the church of the Thessalonians in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: 2 Grace to you and peace from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

- II. **Theology:** The suffering of believers for the truth is seen presently, but judgment and validation will be seen in the eschatological judgment of unbelievers (1:3-12).¹

- A. **Their Past:** Paul is proud of them since they have continued to endure suffering for the truth (1:3-4).

3 We ought always to give thanks to God for you, brethren, as is *only* fitting, because your faith is **greatly enlarged**, and the love of each one of you toward one another **grows ever greater**; 4 therefore, we ourselves speak proudly of you among the churches of God for your **perseverance** and faith in the midst of all your persecutions and afflictions which you **endure**.

- B. **Reasoning:** The clear inequity of the suffering by believers of the truth (by faith) at the hands of unbelievers (sight only) requires a future real judgment (1:5-10).

1. This period of suffering by those who believe the truth indicates the importance of believers’ confidence in Jesus Christ² (1:5).

¹ The ‘Day of the Lord’ here and other places (twice in 1 & 2 Thess.) is defined as

² If there was no difference in life between believers and unbelievers there would be no reason for the theology. Thus the very fact that there is a difference in life and belief which offends unbelievers BASED ON TRUTH is a confirmation that there is a difference to God and that He must judge. Thus it appears that the theology promoted here is that there was no violent judgment coming. The question is, were the antagonists promoting that the judgment was here and it was on the Thessalonians (probably for their condemnation of the unbelievers) or are they claiming that all men are saved and the Thessalonians are suffering for their separation (suffering) uselessly. It appears that it is the latter, based on the phrase “a plain indication”. In other words they are being persecuted for their differences in theology (separation) and the antagonists are indicating a “no judgment” from Christ (i.e., you get what you deserve in this life now). Would the Thessalonians believe that Paul would write a letter saying they deserved persecution, or

5 *This is* a **plain indication** of God's righteous judgment so that you³ may be considered worthy of the kingdom of God, for which indeed **you are suffering**.

2. Unjust affliction of the righteous is an indication that God, who is just, must ultimately judge the afflictors, and relieve the believers (1:6-7a).

6 For after all it is *only* just for God to repay with affliction those who afflict you, 7 and *to give* relief to you who are afflicted and to us as well

3. This will come visibly when Jesus is revealed from heaven (1:7b).

when **the Lord** Jesus shall be **revealed** from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire,

- a. Unbelievers will receive eternal destruction (1:8-9).

8 dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. 9 And these will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power,

- b. Believers will be identified visibly with Jesus Christ (1:10).

10 when He comes to be glorified in His saints on that day, and to **be marveled at** among all who have believed-- for our testimony to you was believed.

that they were being judged in missing the rapture, or that the judgment was on them - - Doubtful in this context. It would rather seem like the antagonist wrote to tell them that the judgment/reward was invisible, to come on them as they deserved. Thus the laziness is based on the fact that they are in the kingdom to enjoy not to work (suffer).

³ He does not mean 'you' singular here, but collectively as believers they are seen as making a major difference in this world. Worthy here then is an indication that they are suffering as Christ.

- C. **Exhortation**: Based on this reasoning, Paul prays that Jesus Christ might be glorified in their lives by their continued perseverance in separation (1:11-12).

11 To this end also we pray for you always that our God may count you worthy of your calling, and fulfill every desire for goodness and the work of faith with power; 12 in order that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in Him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

- III. **Problem**: Some may indicate that the kingdom is now, that is, that judgment and deliverance are occurring, and that all men are saved (2:1-12).

- A. **Problem**: Someone may indicate⁴ that the kingdom ('Day of the Lord') is here (Judgment/Escape is seen in present results).⁵ (2:1-2).

⁴ The use of the term to introduce this clause introduces the heretical writer's concept, not his quotation.

⁵ Based on Paul's reflection of actual viewable events, this person is indicating a present existence of the day of the Lord in a philosophical sense, all men are saved, don't be so dogmatic about future enjoyment, enjoy now. This would mean that the "Day of the Lord" (not the heretics words, but Paul's rephrasing) is philosophical and thus judgment/reward is present now in ones enjoyment of this earth. This seems similar to the Lord's exhortation in Matt. 24 that some will say that it has happened here, or there. Jesus advocates a visible appearing. It is also similar to Noah and the Ark, the ignorance of the real requirement of judgment and its direct relationship to real atonement.

One view on the "Day of the Lord" was that the rapture had taken place and they were left. This is not possible, since there would be no evidence that anyone was gone (including Paul). So it would be somewhat difficult to prove that the rapture had taken place since no one was mysteriously gone.

Another view was there were Jews who say that the 'day of the Lord' had come and the judgment was on Jewish believers as apostates from Judaism has some evidence. This was a Jewish point, that Christians were apostates and that the Jewish judgment of them was appropriate. The Jews saw the Day of the Lord as judging others (See Joel, Amos), but it was on them. This would make the antagonists (the writer of the Letter) Jewish. He would know what the day of the Lord was, and thus would be able to write a letter such as this. According to Acts, there were a considerable amount of Jews who were persecuting the Christians here. The apostasy then could refer to the Jewish apostasy (or the rapture). The major problem with this is that there does not seem to be a Jewish element in this book (even in light of Acts), but seems to be a Gentile oppression, as does 1 Thess. Secondly, the fact that the judgment was on them instead of Jews would make them turn to Judaism. Jews didn't persecute Gentiles since they were not apostates

The “Day of the Lord” has been described in Chapter 1. It is the coming of the Lord in a violent visible judgment on the persecutors (seed of the serpent) of the believers, where they are delivered. He is speaking of the visible coming of Christ.

2:1 Now we request you, brethren, with regard to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and our gathering together⁶ to Him, 2 that you may not be quickly shaken from your composure or be disturbed either by a spirit or a message or a letter as if from us⁷, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come.⁸

- B. **Content Theology**: The eschatological judgment/escape will only be displayed in actual physical events based in the ultimate opposing one to Christ, judged by the real appearance of Jesus Christ and will end in real judgment on unbelievers and real escape for believers in Jesus’ presence.⁹ (2:3-12).

from them. These people were not turning to Judaism but were turning to unruly items (not Jewish). The Jews usually persecuted Paul because he was taking Jews out of their assembly, and teaching that they (Jews) were apostates from God. This does not seem to be the case in the letter here and in 1 Thess.

Another view, and more common in the church today, is that the church was suffering hardship and there were people who were claiming that the tribulation was upon them, that is, post-tribulational belief was being advocated. That is, if they were in the tribulation, then a pre-tribulational rapture could not be correct. The view then goes that the apostasy is the rapture and thus Paul is simply straightening them out that the suffering they are encountering is not the rapture.

⁶ This probably indicates the rapture (since this is deliverance from suffering that he revealed in 1 Thess. 4:11) and the actual coming is the point at which the persecutors will be judged.

⁷ The nature of the conjunctions between the words here does not indicate which one might have occurred since they are all equally joined. The mention in 3:17 of his identifying mark may indicate that it more likely could have been a letter. The contrast is in 2:15 where Paul declares his desire that they listen to their words or writings.

⁸ From other parts of the letter, it is clear that the one who is advocating that it has come is not advocating that it came in the same sense as Paul. He is advocating that it is present (i.e., judgment/reward is in the present). This would indicate universalism, that all are saved and may enjoy/suffer as need be. But Paul says, “not all men have faith”).

⁹ Here is the point of the use of the word “presence” here. It is not a present, nebulous judgment/escape, but will take place in the “presence” of Jesus Christ. Presence is in several places, in the word “parousia” (1 Thess. 2:19, 1 Thess. 3:13, 1

A. The kingdom will not come until the antichrist is revealed (2:3-4).

3 Let no one in any way deceive you, for *it will not come* unless the apostasy¹⁰ comes first, and the man of

Thess. 4:15, 1 Thess. 5:23, 2 Thess. 2:1, 2 Thess. 2:8, 2 Thess. 2:9), “ἐμπροστυει” (1 Thess. 1:3, 1 Thess. 2:19, 1 Thess. 3:9, 1 Thess. 3:13),

¹⁰ “The apostasy” here has several possibilities. One is in a positive sense, “the rapture”. The others are in a negative sense, “falling away” of believers, Jews, or others.

1. The rapture: This does fit into context. He has just stated ‘our gathering together to Him.’ Paul is referring to an actual event and this would fit the context. In addition, Paul is trying to show that it must occur later, and the fact that the rapture would have occurred would be proof. This of course would also fit into the place that he states that they should persevere. The difficulty is that the rapture is “secret” and thus it would not be “evident” visibly as all his other proofs are.

2. The (par excellence) apostasy

- a. of believers: This is unlikely since this would be exactly what Paul was worried about. In addition there is no Biblical documentation of an “apostasy of the church”. (Rev. 17 is debated, but there is no evidence that this is the apostate church, since the harlot was used as a symbol of literal Babylon in Old Testament times, long before the church.)
- b. of Israel: This is a possibility since it is a definite event mentioned in the Old Testament. This apostasy does occur (at its peak) during the covenant with the 10 kingdoms mentioned in Daniel 9:27. The man of lawlessness is then revealed. Thus Paul could be referring to Daniel 9. The problem with this is, again, there seems to be no mention of Israel in this context, but most certainly, Paul had educated them with regard to God’s plan of Israel. This book, however, seems to deal with Gentile judgments of which Daniel 9 is a part in revealing the reversal of rule in the Gentile/Jew issue.

If Paul was taking them through Daniel, then Israel’s apostasy was the first half of the tribulation, while the rise of the man of sin, is primarily the second half of the tribulation.

Conclusion: Paul is in a judgment mode. Paul is expositing Daniel, particularly 9:24-27, in a similar fashion also to Matt. 24 speaking of many falling away (different word). Thus, the emphasis on Daniel leads one to believe that it is speaking of the

lawlessness is **revealed**, the son of destruction, 4 who opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, **displaying** himself as being God.¹¹

- B. The visible eschaton had been revealed previously by Paul¹² (they need to go back to his instruction instead of listening to others) (2:5).

5 Do you not remember that while I was still with you, I was telling you these things?

- C. The fact that these things are not seen presently is due to the fact that God has prevented Satan from proceeding visibly as yet (2:6-7).

6 And you know what restrains him now,¹³ so that in his time he may be revealed. 7 For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only he who now restrains *will do so* until he is taken out of the way.

apostasy of Israel (and of course of Gentile nations who will rule over Israel). This occurs with the covenant that Israel makes with the antichrist in Daniel 9:27, which begins the tribulation. For an excellent resource on this view that the apostasy is that of Israel from the Book of Daniel, see the PhD Dissertation by Keith Kobelia, “Eschatological Rebellion and the *Ἀποστασία* of 2 Thessalonians 2:3,” Dallas Theological Seminary, December 2013.

¹¹ Dan. 7:25, 8:11ff., 8:23ff., 9:26, 27, 11:31ff.

¹² The possibility that Paul was expositing Daniel is very real here. He speaks of the man of lawlessness, his entry into the temple, the return of the Son of Man, the ultimate judgment, the resurrection. It all seems to be there. The most prevailing argument from Daniel is that the messages are the same; the preservation of the remnant (Jewish in Daniel) through the oppression of Gentile rule until the kingdom is returned to the Son of Man.

¹³ The reason that the “restrainer” is unidentified here fits in with Paul’s argument. He is pointing out that the Day of the Lord, the Day of Vengeance is preceded by “visible” occurrences, and he is listing them (from Daniel). The Restrainer and His Restraint are not visible and so Paul does not list Him here since it would not be a visible event or personality. There is difficulty with this identification in that there is a neuter pronoun (“what”) followed by a masculine pronoun (“he”) in 2:6 followed by another masculine pronoun in 2:7 (“he”).

- D. When God releases the restraint the antichrist will visibly do his fullest to oppose God and draw followers to himself through deceit (2:8-12).

8 And then that lawless one¹⁴ will be revealed whom the Lord will slay with the breath of His mouth¹⁵ and bring to an end by the appearance of His coming; 9 *that is*, the one whose coming is in accord with the activity of Satan, with all power and signs and false wonders, 10 and with all the deception of wickedness for those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved. 11 And for this reason God will send upon them a deluding influence so that they might believe what is false,¹⁶ 12 in order that they all may be judged who did not believe the truth, but took pleasure in wickedness.¹⁷

- E. Believers, on the other hand, have been called out of destruction and deceit by God to enjoy eternal comfort with Jesus (2:13-17).

13 But we should always give thanks to God for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth. 14 And it was for this He called you through our gospel, that you may gain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. 15 So then, brethren, stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught, whether by word *of mouth* or by letter from us. 16 Now may our Lord Jesus Christ Himself and God our Father, who has loved us and given us eternal comfort and good hope by

¹⁴ The “lawless one” is the evil prince of Dan. 9:24-27

¹⁵ Isaiah 11:4 speaks regarding God’s judgment on those who have afflicted the righteous. “But with righteousness He will judge the poor, And decide with fairness for the afflicted of the earth; And He will strike the earth with the rod of His mouth, And with the breath of His lips He will slay the wicked.

¹⁶ This passage is based on the passage in Daniel 9:24-27 where the great apostasy takes place, that is that Israel makes a covenant with the antichrist. Israel is deluded, yet God is in control of this. It appears to be that God allows this delusion so that He can bring them into judgment and thus restore the remnant. This is a side hint to the believers that they should not believe the deception that they have received. God will however deceive the unbelievers into buying the antichrist’s theology.

¹⁷ Psalm 5:4 speaks of a God who does not take pleasure in wickedness.

grace, 17 comfort and strengthen your hearts in every good work and word.

IV. **Application:** In view of the real separation and future visible validation of believers and unbelievers, one should continue to live appropriately while waiting (3:1-17).

A. **Application:** Align with Paul and his doctrines as they go forth so that others may be delivered from the judgment of evil men (3:1-2).

3:1 Finally, brethren, pray for us that the word of the Lord may spread rapidly and be glorified, just as *it did* also with you; 2 and that we may be delivered from perverse and evil men; for not all have faith.¹⁸

B. **Application:** Endure in the faith against evil men (3:3-5).

3 But the Lord is faithful, and He will strengthen and protect you from the evil *one*. 4 And we have confidence in the Lord concerning you, that you are doing and will *continue to* do what we command. 5 And may the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God and into the steadfastness of Christ.

C. **Application:** Do not live like the unsaved (laziness, living off others), who do not believe in endurance to a future glory, but enjoyment now (3:6-15).

1. **Command:** Paul commands the believers to obey his instruction and live a life appropriate to endurance to a future rest (3:6).

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

2. **Illustration:** Paul, as an apostle, worked for his own bread, even though he could have lived off of their gifts (3:7-12).

7 For you yourselves know how you ought to follow our example, because we did not act in an undisciplined manner among you, 8 nor did we eat anyone's bread without paying for it, but with labor and hardship we *kept*

¹⁸ Paul is indicating his opposition to the error of universalism.

working night and day so that we might not be a burden to any of you; 9 not because we do not have the right *to this*, but in order to offer ourselves as a model for you, that you might follow our example. 10 For even when we were with you, we used to give you this order: if anyone will not work, neither let him eat. 11 For we hear that some among you are leading an undisciplined life, doing no work at all, but acting like busybodies. 12 Now such persons we command and exhort in the Lord Jesus Christ to work in quiet fashion and eat their own bread.

3. **Application:** Live one's life in light of the instructions of the Lord through Paul ("doing good") as opposed to Gentile teachings (3:13).

13 But as for you, brethren, do not grow weary of doing good.

4. **Application:** Penalty: Those who do not listen to Paul's instruction are to be removed from the assembly (3:14-15).

14 And if anyone does not obey our instruction in this letter, take special note of that man and do not associate with him, so that he may be put to shame. 15 And *yet* do not regard him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother.

- IV. **Closing:** Identify with the Lord Jesus and the peace with God that they have through His name (3:16-18).

16 Now may the Lord of peace Himself continually grant you peace in every circumstance. The Lord be with you all! 17 I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand, and this is a distinguishing mark in every letter; this is the way I write. 18 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.