

Second Baptist Church of Doylestown

Bible Study Notes

Overview: Book Of 2 Thessalonians

9-10-14

VITAL STATISTICS

PURPOSE: To clear up the confusion about the second coming of Christ.

AUTHOR: Paul

ORIGINAL AUDIENCE: The church at Thessalonica

DATE WRITTEN: Approximately A.D. 51 or 52, a few months after 1 Thessalonians, from Corinth

SETTING: Many in the church were confused about the timing of Christ's return. Because of mounting persecution, they thought the day of the Lord must be imminent, and they interpreted Paul's first letter to say that the Second Coming would be at any moment. In light of this misunderstanding, many persisted in being idle and disorderly, with the excuse of waiting for Christ's return.

KEY VERSE: "May the Lord direct your hearts into God's love and Christ's perseverance" (3:5).

KEY PEOPLE: Paul, Silas, Timothy

SPECIAL FEATURES: This is a follow-up letter to 1 Thessalonians. In this letter, Paul indicates various events that must precede the second coming of Christ.

THE BLUEPRINT

1. The bright hope of Christ's return (1:1—2:17)

2. Living in the light of Christ's return (3:1-18) Paul wrote to encourage those who were facing persecution and to correct a misunderstanding about the timing of Christ's return. The teaching about the Lord's return promoted idleness in this young church. The imminent coming of Christ should never make us idle; we should be even more busy—living purely, using our time well, and working for his Kingdom.

We must work not only during easy times when it is convenient but also during difficult times. Christians must patiently watch for Christ's return and work for him while they wait.

MEGATHEMES

Persecution

Explanation: Paul encouraged the church to persevere in spite of troubles and trials. God will bring victory to his faithful followers and judge those who persecute them.

Importance: God promises to reward our faith by giving us his power and helping us bear persecution. Suffering for our faith will strengthen us to serve Christ. We must be faithful to him.

Christ's Return

Explanation: Since Paul had said that the Lord could come at any moment, some of the Thessalonian believers had stopped working in order to wait for Christ.

Importance: Christ will return and bring total victory to all who trust in him. If we are ready, we need not be concerned about when he will return. We should stand firm, keep working, and wait for Christ.

Great Rebellion

Explanation: Before Christ's return, there will be a great rebellion against God led by the man of lawlessness (the antichrist). God will remove all the restraints on evil before he brings judgment on the rebels. The antichrist will attempt to deceive many.

Importance: We should not be afraid when we see evil increase. God is in control, no matter how evil the world becomes. God guards us during Satan's attacks. We can have victory over evil by remaining faithful to God.

Persistence

Explanation: Because church members had quit working and become disorderly and disobedient, Paul chastised them for their idleness. He called on them to show courage and true Christian conduct.

Importance: We must never get so tired of doing right that we quit. We can be persistent by making the most of our time and talents. Our endurance will be rewarded.

Effective communication is difficult; often the message sent is not the message received in the home, marketplace, neighborhood, or church. Even when clearly stated or written, words can be misinterpreted and misunderstood, especially when filtered through the sieve of prejudices and preconceptions.

Paul faced this problem with the Thessalonians. He had written them earlier to help them grow in the faith, comforting and encouraging them by affirming the reality of Christ's return. Just a few months later, however, word came from Thessalonica that some had misunderstood Paul's teaching about the Second Coming. His announcement that Christ could come at any moment had caused some to stop working and just wait, rationalizing their idleness by pointing to Paul's teaching. Adding fuel to this fire was the continued persecution of the church. Many felt that indeed this must be the "day of the Lord."

Responding quickly, Paul sent a second letter to this young church. In it he gave further instruction concerning the Second Coming and the day of the Lord (2:1-2). Second Thessalonians, therefore, continues the subject of 1 Thessalonians and is a call to continued courage and consistent conduct.

The letter begins with Paul's trademark—a personal greeting and a statement of thanksgiving for their faith (1:1-3). He mentions their perseverance in spite of their persecution and trials (1:4) and uses this situation to broach the subject of Christ's return. At that time, Christ will vindicate the righteous who endure and will punish the wicked (1:5-12).

Paul then directly answers the misunderstanding concerning the timing of the events of the end times. He tells them not to listen to rumors and reports that the day of the Lord has already begun (2:1-2) because a number of events must occur before Christ returns (2:3-12). Meanwhile, they should stand firm for Christ's truth (2:13-15), receive God's encouragement and hope (2:16-17), pray for strength and for the spread of the Lord's message (3:1-5), and warn those who are idle (3:6-15). Paul ends with personal greetings and a benediction (3:16-18).

Almost 2,000 years later, we stand much closer to the time of Christ's return; but we also would be wrong to see his imminent appearance as an excuse for idle waiting and heavenward gazing. Being prepared for his coming means spreading the gospel, reaching out to those in need, and building the church, his body. As you read 2 Thessalonians, then, see clearly the reality of his return and your responsibility to live for him until that day.