

1 AND 2 THESSALONIANS - A STUDY GUIDE

THE CENTRAL QUESTION:

What does this story/book say to you about God?

This question can be broken down further as follows:

- a. Why did God do/allow it?
 - b. Why did He record it for our study?
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1. Is there any important truth found in Thessalonians that is not found elsewhere in the Bible? Would we be any worse off if these two letters were left out of the Canon? Why do you think the church fathers included these two short letters? When were these letters written? Was there anything unusual or unique about the church at Thessalonica? From where were these letters written? Had Paul written other letters which became parts of the New Testament before he wrote Thessalonians? (See Acts 17:1-15; 18:5; 1 Thessalonians 3:1-6)

Tentative Chronology of the Early Christian Church

(Modified from 6SDABC p. 101,102)

A.D.

- 31 Crucifixion, Ascension, Pentecost (Luke 23; John 19; Acts 1,2; 5BC, pp. 251-254)
- 34 Stephen stoned; church persecuted; gospel carried to Samaria (Acts 7:1-8:25)
- 35 Paul converted (Acts 9:1-19)
- 35-38 Paul at Damascus, Arabia, and back to Damascus (Galatians 1:17)
- 38 Paul escaped from Damascus during reign of Aretas; visited Jerusalem "after three years" (Galatians 1:18); went to Tarsus (Galatians 1:21)
- 44 James the apostle and brother of John martyred; Peter imprisoned at Passover time; Agrippa died (Acts 12)
- 44-45 Barnabas took Paul to Antioch; Paul remained there "a whole year" (Acts 11:26)
- 45 Barnabas and Paul took famine relief to Jerusalem (Acts 11:25-30)
- 45-47 Paul's first missionary journey; on return, Paul remained at Antioch "no little time" (Acts 14:28, RSV) (**James written**)
- 49 Jerusalem Council, "fourteen years after" (Galatians 2:1)
- 49 Paul started second missionary journey; preached in Phrygia, Galatia, and entered Europe (Acts 15:36-16:40)
- 50-51 Paul arrived at Corinth; stayed one and one-half years (**1 & 2 Thessalonians written**)
- 52 End of second missionary journey; Paul "some time" at Antioch (Acts 18:23)
- 53-58 Paul's third missionary journey: traveled through Asia Minor, stayed three years at Ephesus (**1 & 2 Corinthians written**), traveled through Macedonia, stayed three months at Corinth (**Galatians and Romans written**); left for Jerusalem (Acts 19&20)
- 58-60 Paul arrested in Jerusalem; imprisoned at Caesarea "two years" (Acts 24:27); left in autumn
- 60-61 Paul's journey to Rome; arrived in spring (Acts 28:11-15)
- 61-63 Paul a prisoner in Rome "two whole years" (Acts 28:30); (**Ephesians, Colossians, Philemon, Philippians written; Hebrews may have been written at this time also**)
- 63-66 Paul released from Roman prison; traveled in Crete, Asia Minor, Macedonia (1

Timothy, Titus written; 1 Peter probably also written; Jude likely written)

66 First siege of Jerusalem; Paul re-arrested; **(2 Timothy written; 2 Peter written)**

67 Death of Paul and Peter; **(Acts written-or at least finished)**

70 Destruction of Jerusalem

90-96 John arrested and sent to Patmos by Domitian (ruled A.D. 89-96) **(Revelation written)**; John released from Patmos **(the Gospel of John and the three letters written)**

2. Paul was only able to spend a short time with the Thessalonians before the Jews from Philippi arrived and stirred up trouble and tried to kill Paul and his companions. He spent three weeks speaking in the synagogue and may have continued for a few more weeks in the home of Jason. In that short time, he conducted an “evangelistic campaign” that appealed to Jews, Romans, and Greeks. By the time trouble started, they were apparently ready to die for “the truth” that Paul had given them! What made his words so convincing? What Christian or personal beliefs are you ready to die for?
3. Should one come to the place where one could say, “. . . holy, righteous and blameless we were among you who believed”? (1 Thessalonians 2:10, *NIV*) Did Paul think that he was already perfect? What do you think Paul was referring to in that verse? Is it that he was referring to the way he had persuaded them to be Christians? What about the methods he had used before the Damascus road?
4. What would you understand to be the fulfillment of 1 Thessalonians 2:16, “God’s wrath has come upon them at last”? What would it mean to the Thessalonians? What is implied by 1 Thessalonians 1:10? How does Jesus deliver us from “the wrath to come”? (Compare Romans 1:18,24,26,28) Is Jesus to deliver us from the “wrathful Father-God”? Do we have one “kind God” and one “wrathful God”? What about the Holy Spirit? What does the Holy Spirit do to one who persistently rejects the truth? Doesn’t the Holy Spirit leave that person alone? What is the wrath of the Son? (What is the wrath of the Lamb?) What did Jesus do? What did He say we should do when people will not listen? Take the sandals from off your feet and say, “I’m sorry”? (Matthew 10:14) Is it possible to run a universe that way?
5. What do you think happened that might have led Paul to write, “We wanted to come to you—I, Paul, again and again—but Satan hindered us”? (1 Thessalonians 2:18, *RSV*) How might Satan actually do that? If Satan was working through the Jews, why didn’t Paul mention that? (Compare Matthew 16:23) Why is Satan mentioned so few times in Scripture?
6. From Paul’s answers in 1 Thessalonians 4 and 5, what do you think was the main question in the minds of the Thessalonians? What important details of truth do we learn from 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18? What else did Paul want them to know about the second coming? (1 Thessalonians 1:10; 2:19; 3:13; 5:23)
7. Does 1 Thessalonians 4:14 prove that the dead saints are with Jesus in heaven now? Why does the *New English Bible* say, “God will bring them to life with Jesus”? (Compare the *Good News Bible*) Is this verse primarily referring to the death and resurrection of Jesus? Or to events at the second coming? What would be the purpose of a resurrection of the body if the saints had been enjoying heavenly bliss for many years already?
8. Having read 1 and 2 Thessalonians, do you believe that those who are alive and remain to see Jesus come will have any special advantage or privilege over those who have “fallen

asleep”? (See 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18)

9. What does it mean to “rejoice evermore”? (1 Thessalonians 5:16) Do you “pray without ceasing”? (1 Thessalonians 5:17) Can you do any work while you are praying?
10. Why did Paul find it necessary to write, “test everything”? (1 Thessalonians 5:21) Do you have to prove everything? Can you test spiritual things with the intellect? If not, how do you test them? Surely, we do not need to test things coming from God! (Matthew 24:24; 1 John 4:1) Or do we?
11. Should we “greet all the brothers and sisters with a holy kiss”? (1 Thessalonians 5:26, *NRSV*; compare *The Living Bible* or *Phillips*) Is this command significantly different from the one in 1 Peter 5:14?
12. Did Paul suggest that there were forged letters going around? Who do you think would stoop to use such methods? (See 2 Thessalonians 2:2; 3:17; Galatians 6:11; compare 2 Timothy 2:16,18; 1 Corinthians 16:21; Colossians 4:18)
13. How could the Thessalonians have been apparently upset by the “delay” in the return of Jesus in A.D. 51? (2 Thessalonians 2:1-12; compare 2 Peter 3:3-17) What would have led them to think that He was coming back so soon? Why didn’t God, through Paul, clearly explain to them that thousands of years would have to pass first? Was God dishonest in suggesting through the apostles 2000 years ago that time was almost over? (See 1 John 2:18; compare Joel 1:15; 2:1,2; 3:14)
14. Who was Paul referring to when he wrote, “The man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of perdition, who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God”? (2 Thessalonians 2:3-4, *RSV*; compare Isaiah 14:12-14) Could this refer to more than one individual?
15. When will the events of 2 Thessalonians 2:8 take place? Was Paul writing about the second or the third coming? Did he differentiate between the two?
16. When do the events pictured in 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12 take place? Is that at the second coming, before the second coming, or at the third coming? Does God sometimes “mix up” events that happen at different times? (See Matthew 24, Mark 13, and Luke 21) Does this passage refer primarily to the papacy, or to Satan himself? (See *GC* 593,624,625; *5T* 698; *8T* 27,28)
17. If you knew with certainty that Jesus was coming back in one year, would it change what you are doing now? If Jesus was coming in five years? In ten years? In twenty years? Soon after you die?

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