

# *The Second Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the* **THESSALONIANS**

## **INTRODUCTION**

**1. Title.** In the earliest extant Greek manuscripts the title of this epistle is simply, *Pros Thessalonikeis B* (“To [the] Thessalonians II”). The considerably lengthened title in the KJV, *The Second Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Thessalonians*, is the result of later elaboration.

**2. Authorship.** Until recent times the Pauline authorship of the epistle has not been seriously questioned. The character of Paul is reflected throughout the epistle. The author’s tender regard for his converts (ch. 2:13–17), his commendation of their virtues (chs. 1:3–5; 3:4), the extreme care he uses in pointing out weaknesses, and yet the strong, authoritative nature of his commands (ch. 3:6, 12), all give evidence that the author was Paul. Not until the early part of the 19th century was serious question raised over the Pauline authorship of the section dealing with the “man of sin.” It was urged that there is nothing else of such an apocalyptic nature in Paul’s other epistles. This fact, however, does not make unreasonable the long-held view that Paul wrote the epistle. Although he nowhere else deals so directly with the apocalyptic, the fact that he did have visions (Acts 22:17–21; 2 Cor. 12:2–4) makes it understandable that he could have written such an apocalyptic passage. The author’s treatment of this prophecy, with the earnest solicitude that God’s people should not be deceived with respect to the time of the Lord’s coming, but be ready for that great event, is definitely Pauline.

The genuineness of the epistle is sustained by strong evidence. Besides being named in the earliest extant lists of the NT canon, the second epistle is referred to or quoted by the same early church writers as is the first epistle (see p. 223). In addition, it seems to have been known by Polycarp (c. A.D. 150; *Epistle of Polycarp to the Phillipians* 11); and Justin Martyr (c. A.D. 150; *Dialogue With Trypho* 32; 110) mentions the “man of sin,” as if making reference to Paul’s prophecy in 2 Thess. 2:3. Concerning the date of writing see Vol. VI, p. 103.

**3. Historical Setting.** That the time and place of writing of the second epistle are the same as for the first is evident from the fact that the same three apost-

les are associated together (see 1 Thess. 1:1; 2 Thess. 1:1). Paul remained at Corinth only a year and a half on his Second Missionary Tour (see Acts 18:11), and there is no evidence that Silas was associated with him later. The second letter must have been written not more than a few months after the first; consequently their historical backgrounds are in general the same (see p. 223; for a discussion of the date of writing see Vol. VI p. 103). Probably the messenger who bore the first epistle returned and brought information to Paul that there was a feverish, fanatical spirit of unrest spreading among the members at Thessalonica owing to a feeling that the Lord's advent was about to take place. This condition demanded immediate attention. Any delay would be fatal to the best interests of the church, for among these humble Christians were fainthearted ones who were in grave danger of falling a prey to the deceptions of agitators.

**4. Theme.** In view of the problems at Thessalonica that prompted this letter, one of its first objectives was to assure the humble Christians of that church of their acceptance with the Lord. He insists that he must thank God for the victories won. He notes their advance in the Christian virtues of faith (2 Thess. 1:3), brotherly love (2 Thess. 1:3; cf. 1 Thess. 4:9, 10), and steadfastness under persecution (2 Thess. 1:4).

Since the second letter says nothing further in regard to the manner of Christ's coming and the resurrection of the righteous dead, the first letter must have succeeded in enlightening the church concerning these matters. In accomplishing this, however, the apostle had emphasized the necessity of being prepared for the great day of the Lord's return, of daily living with the second coming of Christ constantly in view (1 Thess. 5:1–11; cf. Titus 2:11–13). This emphasis upon the second advent seems to have been understood by many as indicating that Paul expected Christ's return almost immediately (see 2 Thess. 2:2). That such was not his meaning he now hastens to explain, reminding his readers that he had taught them in person that the apostasy, followed by the appearance of the antichrist, must first take place (see vs. 2, 3, 5). Paul appeals directly to the unruly idlers, who apparently claimed that work was unnecessary in view of the imminent advent. He had already warned them in his first epistle (1 Thess. 4:11; 5:14), and now he commands and admonishes them in the Lord (2 Thess. 3:12). He urges that the church take disciplinary measures against them, with the objective of reforming them (vs. 14, 15).

Thus the theme of the second epistle, as that of the first, is practical godliness (ch. 1:11, 12). The fainthearted must be comforted and established (ch. 2:17); the agitators must be silenced (ch. 3:12). The church must know of the deceptive work of the great adversary in bringing about the apostasy and the reign of the antichrist, and also of the final overthrow of all the power of Satan (ch. 2:3–12). With the glorious hope of the triumph of God's cause before them, the Thessalonian Christians are urged so to live that they may be accounted worthy of the Lord's calling (ch. 1:11, 12).