

NOTES FOR INDIVIDUAL OR GROUP STUDY IN THE BOOK OF II THESSALONIANS - PART TWO

Only a few months after their first encouraging letter to the Thessalonian Christians, Paul had to call his team together again to respond to a potentially disastrous situation which had arisen. The problem concerned false teaching which had crept in. Its claim was that Jesus Christ had already returned and the day of the Lord had come.(2:2) Some had assumed in the light of this that there was no point in working, presumably because they would be leaving earth for heaven at any minute.(3:11) How should Paul respond? Most of us would launch straight into a withering rebuke of those who had taught this as well as those foolish enough to believe it. It is remarkable testimony to Paul's wisdom as a leader that the first chapter makes no mention of what had gone wrong.

Instead he begins exactly as last time by introducing his co-writers, Silvanus, a long respected Jewish Christian teacher who had travelled with Paul when he first came to Thessalonica,(Acts 15-17) and Timothy, a young convert from Lystra who had been like a son to Paul.(Acts 16:1-3) He acknowledges his readers by reminding them again that they were God's congregation because they were IN God, both Father and Son. His greeting is unchanged, grace, all we have totally undeserved because of Christ, and peace, the war with God has been ended by Jesus Himself dying on the cross.(1:1,2)

Paul's prayer for them is still one of thanksgiving, despite the failures he is going to have to address. Their faith towards God is growing even stronger as their love towards others is extending ever wider and deeper. This was despite the opposition and ill-treatment they received from the Lord's enemies becoming tougher and tougher. Dealing with oppressors is God's business. Faith under fire is characteristic of those who are worthy of salvation. The Greek word for 'worthy', 'axios' comes from the idea of 'weighing' as in the English expression that someone is 'worth their weight in gold'. It is Jesus in our lives that transforms us from lightweights into people of solid value.(1:3-5)

Knowing that Christ will return is so important when we are under attack because that will be when He will deal with those who cause us to suffer. Their punishment will be deserved because they refused to know God and therefore to obey Him.(Matt.7:23) There will be absolutely no doubt about this momentous event when it happens. There will be no way the return of Jesus could happen so quietly that anyone could miss it. Paul is already laying the basis for chapter 2.(1:6-8)

The consequence of God's judgement on those who refuse His love will be destruction for ever. The worst aspect of hell will be the consciousness that they have chosen to live without Him, and His power. A loving God would not compel men to be in His presence in heaven if they did not want to. By contrast those who believe the message of the gospel will belong to Him, and all He is will be so marvellously evident in their lives. It is a simple choice.(1:9,10)

Paul's longing for the Thessalonians was that their trust in God will be so genuine that when God weighs them in judgement the presence of Jesus in their lives will be

unmistakable. King Belshazzar was told by Daniel who interpreted the writing which appeared on the wall of his banqueting room that he had been 'weighed on the scales and found deficient.' (Dan.5:27) One of the marks of Christian genuineness is the deep desire to be the best, as by faith we live in His strength. If that is the case then all that Jesus Christ is will show in us.(1:11,12)

QUESTIONS ON CHAPTER TWO

2:1,2 Q.1 What does Paul again remind the Thessalonians is the basis of their hope? By what mechanism does wrong teaching throw us off track? What false teaching had they received? By what three possible means had this teaching come to them? Give modern examples of similar problems arising.

2:3-5 Q.2 What two events have to come before the Lord's return? How will we recognise them? Why had they no excuse for being carried away by this wrong teaching?

2:6-12 Q.3 How could they be sure that the terrible time Paul describes had not yet happened? Who restrains the 'man of lawlessness'? (Dan.7:25; 8:25; 11:36; 12:1) Once he has come, how will he finally be dealt with? Why will people so easily be taken in by the man of lawlessness? What simple protection is there against this happening to any of us?

2:13-15 Q.4 Why is Paul confident that the Thessalonian Christians will not be taken in by the man of lawlessness? What steps does he describe to salvation and eventually glory? What therefore does he urge them to do now? How should we do the same when we hear new teaching?

2:16,17 Q.5 While we struggle with wrong teaching what does God do to keep us safe from eventual damage? What should we expect to be the consequences of letting Him protect us in this way?