



## 10. The Letters to the Thessalonians

*Background. The Parousia and the "Rapture." "As a Thief in the Night." "Except Their Be A Falling Away First," Early Forgeries and False Teachers.*

### "Lo, the Mighty God Appearing!" (hymn no. 55)

1. Lo, the mighty God appearing!  
From on high Jehovah speaks!  
Eastern lands the summons hearing,  
O'er the west his thunder breaks.  
Earth behold him! Earth behold him!  
Universal nature shakes.  
Earth behold him! Earth behold him!  
Universal nature shakes.

2. Zion, all its light unfolding,  
**God in glory shall display.**  
**Lo! he comes! nor silence holding;**  
Fire and clouds prepare his way.  
Tempests round him! Tempests round him!  
Hasten on the dreadful day.  
Tempests round him! Tempests round him!  
Hasten on the dreadful day.

<https://www.lds.org/music/library/hymns/lo-the-mighty-god-appearing?lang=eng>

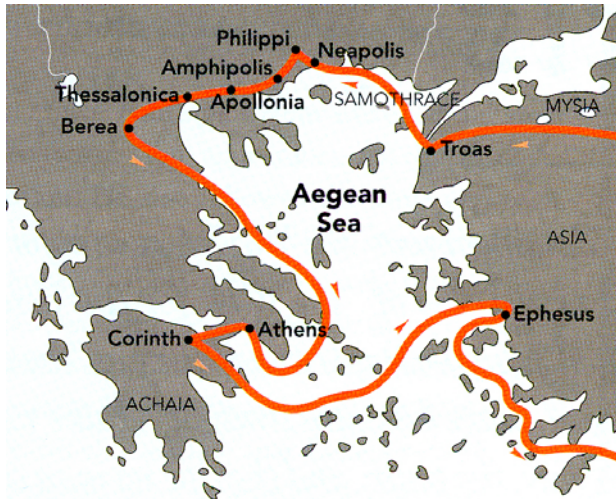
3. To the heav'ns his voice ascending,  
To the earth beneath he cries.

**Souls immortal, now descending,**  
**Let their sleeping dust arise!**

Rise to judgment! Rise to judgment!  
Let thy throne adorn the skies.  
Rise to judgment! Rise to judgment!  
Let thy throne adorn the skies.

4. Now the heav'ns on high adore him  
And his righteousness declare.  
Sinners perish from before him,  
But his Saints his mercies share.  
Just his judgments! Just his judgments!  
God, himself the judge, is there.  
Just his judgments! Just his judgments!  
God, himself the judge, is there.

## Paul and the Thessalonians



- Paul spent “thee sabbaths” in **Thessalonica** during the “Second” Missionary Journey of AD 49–52
- A few Jews, “devout” men (God-fearers), and prominent women are among the converts mentioned by Acts 17:4
- Paul and Silas fled to Berea before the church could be established (or taught) further
- Paul wrote the church while headquartered at Corinth

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## Occasional Situation of 1 Thessalonians

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*A NEW CHRISTIAN CONGREGATION UNSURE OF FUNDAMENTAL DOCTRINES, THE CHURCH AT THESSALONIKA HAD QUESTIONS ABOUT THE LOSS OF LOVED ONES AND THE NATURE AND TIMING OF THE SECOND COMING*

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## New Converts and Problems of Understanding

- **Paul was forced to leave his new converts after as little as three weeks**
  - Although he taught them **the basics of the Christian message**, *they would not know the details of doctrine*
  - They expected him to return soon, but as much as a year elapsed before he wrote this letter
- **The congregation was predominately Gentile, presupposing significant changes of lifestyle**
  - As always, **Paul was worried about proper Christian behavior**
- **Paul's early preaching tended to be eschatological, stressing the (presumed) imminent return of Jesus**
- Occasion: Timothy came to Paul in Corinth and reported Thessalonian concerns (next slide)

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## Timothy's Report

- Timothy, whom Paul had sent to Thessalonika to check on the new members returned to Paul with news of the church there
- Occasion: **a young church had concerns and questions for their absent leader**
  - **Why had Paul not returned?**
    - *They still wanted instruction and wanted to know how to better live as new Christians*
  - **What about fellow Christians who had died?**
    - *In view of Paul's stress of eschatology, he may not have preached much about life after death, assuming that most members would be present when Jesus returned*
  - When would Jesus return?

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## Overview of 1 Thessalonians

- Date: Perhaps the earliest extant Christian writing (A.D. 50 or 51)
- Audience: congregation in **Thessalonika**
  - *Predominately Gentile and new in the faith: Paul does not mention the Law, circumcision, or make direct references to the OT*
- From: Wrote **from Corinth** within in a few months of his initial preaching
  - This despite the subscription that claims the letter was written from Athens (see next slide)
- [Authenticity (Authorship): some scholars questions whether the authorship of some of the later letters, but there is **little disagreement about this letter**]
- [Unity: some argue that 1 Thess contains fragments of 2 or 3 letters]
- Integrity: one passage may be a later, scribal interpolation
  - *E.g., 2:14-16 may be an insertion because its harsh language about Jewish persecution in Judea*

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## Literary Questions about 1 Thessalonians

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WHAT KIND OF LETTER IS IT? HOW IS THE LETTER  
STRUCTURED? WHAT KIND OF WRITING AND RHETORIC DOES  
PAUL USE IN IT?

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# 1 Thessalonians: Structure

## Literary Questions

### • Opening Formula (Salutation)

- “Paul, Silas and Timothy, To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace and peace to you.” (1:1NIV)

### • Thanksgiving (1:2-10)

### • Body (2:1-5:22)

- **“Pauline Indicative” or “reporting/teaching” section: his relationship to the Thessalonians (2:1-3:13)**
  - Paul’s behavior at Thessalonica (2:1-12)
  - Further Thanksgiving for their reception of the gospel (2:13-16)
  - Paul’s concern for the Thessalonians in his absence (2:17-3:5)
  - Timothy’s encouraging report (3:6-13)
- **“Pauline Imperative” or “ethical” section (4:1-5:22)**
  - Ethical Admonitions (4:1-12)
  - Instructions about the Parousia (4:13-5:11)
  - Instructions about Church Life (5:12-22)

### • Concluding Formula (5:23-28)

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1503 1 THESSALONIANS 5:24—2 THESSALONIANS 1:11

24 Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it.

25 Brethren, pray for us.

26 Greet all the brethren with a holy kiss.

27 I charge you by the Lord that

28 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen.

\* The first epistle unto the Thessalonians was written from Athens.

THE SECOND EPISTLE OF PAUL THE APOSTLE TO THE THESSALONIANS

CHAPTER 1

4 So that we ourselves glory in you in the churches of God for your glory of his power:

10 When he shall come to be glorified

“We thought it good to be left at Athens alone; And sent Timotheus...to comfort you... But now when Timotheus came from you unto us, [he] brought us good tidings.” (1 Thes. 3:1-2,6)

“After these things Paul departed from Athens, and came to Corinth... And when Silas and Timotheus were come from Macedonia, Paul...testified to the Jews that Jesus was Christ.” (Acts 18:1,5)

## On KJV Subscriptions

**Subscription:** added by a copyist at the end of the text he was copying.

“One may be misled by the King James Version notes at the end of every letter. These little postscripts are called ‘subscriptions’ from the fact that **copyists wrote them** underneath or after the letters. But the sentence notes appear very late — their earliest form is fourth century, so **they are merely scribes’ opinions.**” (Richard L. Anderson, *Understanding Paul*, 72)

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## Themes and Characteristics

- **Lacks Paul's later focus on righteousness by faith over the works of the law**
  - This first appears in Galatians and later Romans
    - *During the Protestant Reformation, Luther made this the central Pauline characteristic justification by faith. Was it?*
  - Instead of looking for some such "theological focus," consider instead Sanders' **basic "Christ message"** (effectively the *kērygma* plus ethical injunctions)
- **Paul felt genuine love for the converts, whom he calls "brothers" some fourteen times**
- He was concerned about the new saints and their lack of maturity in the gospel
  - ***Much of the letter focuses on how they should live as Saints***
    - Ethics—patterns of right behavior: *in Classical thought, doing the right thing at the right time for the right reason*
    - *Uses Greek philosophic language and slogans to teach Christian ethics!*
- **Particular need to qualify the Thessalonians' understanding of the Parousia** (glorious second coming of Christ)
  - Paul's own views of the Second Coming seemed to be evolving and maturing

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## Teachings and Admonitions in 1 Thessalonians

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*"WE GIVE THANKS TO GOD ALWAYS FOR YOU ALL, MAKING MENTION OF YOU IN OUR PRAYERS; REMEMBERING WITHOUT CEASING YOUR WORK OF FAITH, AND LABOUR OF LOVE, AND PATIENCE OF HOPE IN OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST, IN THE SIGHT OF GOD AND OUR FATHER; KNOWING, BRETHREN BELOVED, YOUR ELECTION OF GOD." (1:2-4)*

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## On the *Parousia* . . .

- Although *parousia* literally means simply “presence” or “arrival,” it was also the Greek term used to translated the Latin *adventus*, which in the imperial period was specifically applied to the state visit of an emperor.
  - *For Paul and the early Christians, the Lord was the ultimate emperor, whose return would be far more glorious than that of any earthly sovereign.* They would be the ones chosen to meet him and were preparing themselves for that day.
- Examples of *parousia* translated as “coming”
  - “For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming [*parousia*]?” (2:19)
  - “To the end he may stablish your hearts unblameable in holiness before God, even our Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his saints.” (3:13)
  - “For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep.” (4:15 NKJV)
  - “And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.” (5:23)
- This contrasts with the experience of the wicked at the second coming, for which Paul often borrows the imagery of “The Great and Dreadful Day of the Lord” from Jewish scripture
  - *Escaping the “coming wrath” actually seems to be one of the major components of Paul’s missionary message!*
- As Paul matured in his ministry his eschatological perspective continued to change, as he realized that he, and indeed most Christians, would not witness the glorious advent in mortal flesh. *Nevertheless, he never lost his faith that Jesus would in fact return.*

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## Instructions and Exhortations (4:1–5:22)

*Parakalō* section: “I exhort you”

- **Ethical admonitions (4:1–12)**
  - **Leading a life pleasing to God – good public morality**
  - These injunctions echo common Stoic and Epicurean slogans
    - “taught of God,” a common Stoic notion
    - “work with your hands” and “lack nothing” stress Stoic self-sufficiency
    - “brotherly love,” Epicurean ideal
    - “study to be quiet/aspire to live quietly” and “do your own business/mind your own affairs” reflect the Epicurean maxim “escape notice as you live”
- **Instructions about the Parousia (4:13–5:11)**
  - The return of Christ uses language familiar to both Jewish apocalyptic expectation and the imperial cult
  - Christ’s second coming and those who have died . . .
    - *Usually teachings about the parousia would be in the indicative or teaching section, but Paul puts them in the imperative sections because he is bidding the saints not to mourn and to comfort each other with these teachings*

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## “Caught Up to Meet Him . . .”

What specifics did Paul teach about the Parousia?

- **Do not sorrow over saints that have died**
  - But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, *that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope*. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, *even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him.*” (4:13–14)
- **The dead in Christ rise first**
  - “For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that **we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep**. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: *and the dead in Christ shall rise first*” (4:15–16)
  - “shall not prevent” actually **means “precede” or “come before”** (*phthasōmen*)
- **Those in Christ will rise to meet him**
  - “Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.” (4:17)
  - Apostolically mandated funeral counsel! “Wherefore comfort one another with these words.” (4:18)

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## The “Rapture?”



- “. . . Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air. . .” (4:17)
  - In Latin “caught up” is rendered with the verb *rapio/raptus*, from which comes the popular Evangelical Protestant term “the Rapture”
  - The publication in 1861 of the 1830 vision of a Scottish-Irish girl named Margaret MacDonald popularized the idea of a “Pre-tribulation Rapture,” meaning that an invisible appearance of Jesus would be accompanied by the “rapture” of true Christians before the trials that precede and accompany the visible Second Coming
- Exposition: “[At the Second Coming] *the saints that are upon the earth, who are alive, shall be quickened and be caught up to meet him. And they who have slept in their graves shall come forth, for their graves shall be opened; and they also shall be caught up to meet him* in the midst of the pillar of heaven — They are Christ’s, the first fruits, they who shall descend with him first.” (D&C 88:95–98)
  - The doctrine of the resurrection of the righteous dead and the transformation of the living who will inherit celestial glory, then, is sound, but Latter-day Saints differ with some other groups on the timing and the mechanics

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## “As a Thief in the Night . . .”

- Paul’s continued teaching on the second coming, however, relayed Jesus’ own teaching about the uncertainty of the timing of the Second Coming
  - “that day and that hour knoweth no man . . .” (Mark 13:32; Matt 24:26)
  - “For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh **as a thief in the night**.” (1 Thess 5:2; **a dominical saying**, perhaps in reference to Matt 24:43?)
- The early Christians expected the Lord to return soon, as did Paul, but **he reminded them that they did not know exactly when**
  - “While people are saying, ‘Peace and safety,’ **destruction will come on them suddenly**, as labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape.” (5:3 NIV)
    - *Pax et Securitas* was an element of imperial propaganda frequently found on coins; Cf. “All is well in Zion!” (2 Nephi 28:21)
  - “But let us, who are of the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love; and for an helmet, the hope of salvation [anticipates Eph 6:11-18]. **For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ, Who died for us, that, whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with him.**” (5:8-10)

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## Further Exhortation: Instructions about Church Life (5:12–22 NIV)

- “Now we ask you, brothers, to respect those who work hard among you, who are over you in the Lord and who admonish you.” (5:12, KJV “know”)
- “Hold them in the highest regard in love because of their work. Live in peace with each other.” (5:13)
- “And we urge you, brothers, **warn those who are idle**, encourage the timid, help the weak, be patient with everyone.” (5:14; see 2 Thess)
- “Make sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong, but always try to be kind to each other and to everyone else.” (5:15)
- “Be joyful always;” (5:16)
- “pray continually” (5:17)
- “give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus” (5:18)
- “**Do not put out the Spirit’s fire**” (5:19)
- “**do not treat prophecies with contempt**” (5:20)
- “**Test everything. Hold on to the good.**” (5:21)
- “Avoid every kind of evil.” (5:22; KJV “all appearances of evil”)

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## 2 Thessalonians

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 CORRECTING SOME OF THE EXCITED EXPECTATIONS  
 THAT PERHAPS 1 THESSALONIANS HAD FANNED?

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### Overview of 2 Thessalonians

- Date: A.D. 51/52, shortly after 1 Thess
  - *Some scholars, however, propose that 2 Thess was written first*
- Audience: saints in **Thessalonica**
- From: probably still **Corinth**
  - From Athens and sent with Timothy on his visit if 1 Thess was written first
- Unity and Integrity: Not questioned, few signs of interpolations
- Authenticity: **secular scholarship has questioned Pauline authorship, although not convincingly**
  - Similarity in format to 1 Thess—why would Paul copy himself so mechanically . . .
    - *But then, why not? Paul could have written 2 Thess so soon after the first letter that he recalled the earlier wording*
  - **Eschatological perspectives are so different**—1 Thess suggests Christ is coming soon, 2 Thess reminds its readers that many events still need to transpire first (2:1-12)
    - *But Paul could be correcting excessive enthusiasm caused by his first letter*
    - —or his correction of their expectation of an imminent return of Jesus led to their concerns about their dead loved ones that he then addressed in 1 Thess
  - *Strange hints of forgery (2:2 and 3:17, more below)*

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## Structure of 2 Thessalonians

- **Opening Formula (1:1–2)**
  - Thanksgiving for Thessalonians' faith and prayer, which will save them at the Parousia (1:3–10)
    - Prayer addition (1:11–12)
- **Thanksgiving (1:3–12)**
- **Body (2:1–3:16)**
  - **“Pauline Indicative,” instructions (2:1–17)**
    - **Signs that precede the Parousia (2:1–12): a falling away first**
    - further thanksgiving and instructions on God's election of the Thessalonian saints
  - **“Pauline Imperative,” exhortations (3:1–15)**
    - Paul requests and offers prayer (3:1–5)
    - Ethical admonitions and exhortations against idleness (get to work rather than waiting for the millennium) and disobedience (3:6–15)
- **Concluding Formula: blessings and greeting (3:16–18)**
  - **Postscript: final salutation and blessing in Paul's own hand (3:17–18)**

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## Early Forgeries and False Teachers?

- **“Concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to him,** we ask you, brothers, **not to become easily unsettled or alarmed by some prophecy, report or letter supposed to have come from us, saying that the day of the Lord has already come.”** (2:1–2 NIV)
  - “A careful reading of 2 Thess. 2:2 gives the impression that **some person might have forged a letter purporting to come from Paul**, which gave faulty information to the Thessalonians and caused them to be shaken in mind and considerably troubled . . . These reports from Macedonia together with accounts of continued persecution, convinced the great missionary that he ought to write the Thessalonian Saints another letter.” (Sidney B. Sperry, *Paul's Life and Letters*, 101)
  - “A presbyter [‘elder’] in Asia composed that writing [3 Cor.], **augmenting, as it were, a narrative from his own materials under Paul's name**. After he was convicted he confessed that he had done it out of love for Paul and he was removed from his office.” (Tertullian, *On Baptism*, 17)
- “This greeting is in my own hand—PAUL. It is the mark of genuineness in every letter; this is my own writing.” (3:17 NJB)
  - This is what an ancient letter called **a postscript; a scribe wrote the letter, the “author” wrote this**
  - “Paul probably dictated most of his letters, but in this one and some others he writes a greeting toward the end of his own distinctive handwriting, to give a warm personal touch and also to prevent forgery . . .” (Sidney B. Sperry, *Paul's Life and Letters*, 105)

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## “Except There Come a Falling Away First . . .”

- “Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come **a falling away** first . . .” (2:3a)
  - **apostasia**, meaning “defiance of established system or authority, rebellion, abandonment, breach of faith”
  - “The term ‘falling away’ may give the incorrect impression of a process of drifting or gradually losing ground. The original Greek term, *apostasía* (from which we have the English word ‘apostasy’), means something much more drastic. Ancient sources use the term to describe **political rebellion and revolution**.” (Kent P. Jackson, “Early Signs of the Apostasy,” *Ensign* [Dec. 1984], 9)
- “. . . and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that **he as God sitteth in the temple of God**, shewing himself that he is God.” (2:3b-4)
  - “Lucifer is the man of sin, spoken of by Paul.” (Bruce R. McConkie, *DNTC*, 3:63)
  - “The real question is how Paul used the word temple in his writing. Almost always he used it figuratively... Usually the Church is the temple of God... Paul must define Paul, and his own words show that **he was here referring to the Church**.” (Richard L. Anderson, *Understanding Paul*, 86)

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## “Keep Away from Believers Who Are Living in Idleness . . .”

- “Now we command you, beloved, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, to **keep away from believers who are living in idleness** and not according to the tradition that they received from us.” (3:6 NRSV)
  - *ataktos peripatountos*, KJV “walketh disorderly”; see 1 Thess 5:14, 2 Thess 3:11
  - Were some of the saints idle because they were awaiting the Parousia?
- “For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that **if any would not work, neither should he eat**.” (3:10)
  - See D&C 42:42, “Thou shalt not be idle; for he that is idle shall not eat the bread nor wear the garments of the laborer.”
  - Paul uses himself as an example, citing how he has worked while he was with the Thessalonians
    - “For you yourselves know how you ought to follow our example. We were not idle when we were with you, nor did we eat anyone’s food without paying for it. On the contrary, **we worked night and day, laboring and toiling so that we would not be a burden to any of you**. We did this, not because we do not have the right to such help, but in order to make ourselves a model for you to follow.” (3:7-9)

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