



1 AND 2 THESSALONIANS

ENCOURAGEMENT AND GROWTH IN
CHARITY, HOPE, AND HOLINESS

CA. AD 50–51

1 THESSALONIANS

Thessalonica

Thessalonica was the capital of Northern Greece (Macedonia) and the most populated city in the province (65,000 to 80,000 people within the city, and 100,000 living directly without the wall).¹ In 316 BC, a general in Alexander the Great's army founded the city. In 146 BC, it became a Roman "free city" and capital of the province. "Free cities" enjoyed special tax concessions, privileges, and patriotism. By the time of Paul, the city was a great commercial center as it intersected the major highways, east to west and north to south, that spanned across the Roman Empire.

PAUL AND THE THESSALONIANS

Most of our historical information comes from Acts. Shortly before Paul first visited Thessalonica, he met with the elders at the Jerusalem Council in approximately 49 AD (Acts 15:4–21). After the group’s verdict was agreed on—not to require Christians to live the Law of Moses—Paul and his new companion Silas embarked on his second apostolic mission. While preaching in Troas, Paul had a vision of a man saying: “Come over into Macedonia” (Acts 16:9–12). Paul took Silas, Luke and Timothy and sailed to northern Greece. After preaching in Philippi, the missionaries made their way inland, 80 miles further west, to Thessalonica (Acts 17:1).

Paul started his missionary efforts in Thessalonica at the synagogue, as well as working with “devout Greeks, a great multitude, and the chief women not a few” (Acts 17:4). After three weeks, the angered Jews caused an uproar to destroy the Christians. In the tumult, they took a new wealthy convert, Jason, to prison (Acts 17:7–9). The Lord blessed Paul and Silas to sneak out by night and flee to Berea (and later to Athens, and Corinth, Acts 7:10–15).

The new converts held their new faith together, and they grew to the point that they offered Paul at least four other missionary companions over the next few years (Acts 19:29; 20:4). By the time Paul got to Corinth (250 miles away), he had taken the time to write them this letter.

In ancient Thessalonica, archeologists have found a Jewish and a Samaritan synagogue, a Roman forum, a Hellenistic Stadium, a temple of Serapis, the Cardar Arch, a gymnasium, and coins with Zeus and a variety of other gods (including Egyptian cults like Isis, and Osiris). All of this is evidence that the city enjoyed extensive wealth and variety of worship.² Paul added one more religion there when he introduced Christianity.

Attested Pauline Authorship

When Bible studies claim “attested Pauline” they mean:

1 Thessalonians, 1 & 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Romans, Philemon, Philippians.

*This Chronological Grouping Represents Pure Paul.*³ Paul wrote to the saints in Thessalonica shortly after he established the church there. He was still on his second apostolic mission, either in Athens or Corinth.

Purpose of the Letter

Paul divides his Epistle into two sections: A celebration of the saints’ faithfulness and encouragement for them to progress, “to supply what is lacking in their faith.” He divides the two sections with a prayer or blessing (1 Thessalonians 3:11–13). He begins and ends the Epistle with a prayer or blessing as well.

Outline of 1 Thessalonians

REJOICING IN THE SAINTS’ FAITHFULNESS

- 1:1–10 Greeting and Thanks
- 2:1–12 Paul’s Ministry in Thessalonica
- 2:13–16 Reception and Opposition to the Message
- 2:17–20 Paul’s Desire to Visit Them Again.
- 3:1–5 Timothy’s Visit
- 5:6–13 Timothy’s Encouraging Report

ENCOURAGEMENT FOR THE SAINTS TO PROGRESS

- 4:1–12 Live to Please God: *Sanctification and Love*
- 4:3–8 Sexual Immorality
- 4:9–12 Charity and Self-Sufficiency
- 4:13–18 The Dead Saints Will Come When Jesus Returns
- 5:1–11. The Timing of the Second Coming
- 5:12–15 Relationships with Each Other
- 5:16–22 Relationships with God
- 5:23–28. Paul’s Final Blessing or Prayer

1 THESSALONIANS: OLDEST EPISTLE IN THE BIBLE

Chronologically, 1 Thessalonians was the oldest Epistle written and the first of Paul’s fourteen canonized letters. As we see, Paul was already a skilled writer by this time.

When the NT was compiled, the scholars chose to organize the Epistles not by date, but by length—the longest were placed first. As Paul wrote more than any other author, his Epistles came first. His first nine NT Epistles are to communities (which were read out aloud to the congregation), followed by his four shorter Epistles written to individuals.

PART 1: REJOICING IN THE SAINTS’ FAITHFULNESS

Formal Greeting

1 Thessalonians 1:1

1 Thessalonians 1:1 “Paul, and Silvanus, and Timotheus, *servants of God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, unto the church of the Thessalonians*” (JST) Paul formally opens with his companions’ Greek names: Silvanus for Silas and Timonethus for Timothy. They had just joined Paul in Corinth after visiting the saints in Thessalonica (1 Thessalonians 3:6; Acts 18:5). Eight of Paul’s fourteen letters include another name as a co-sender. Six times it is Timothy, twice Silas, and once, Sosthenes. The JST adds a doctrinally significant phrase. We find the apostles introducing themselves as “servants” of Christ in at least seven Epistles. This highlights that Paul is not claiming leadership but servitude. He honors the Lord as the head of his work and church.

“**Grace be unto you and Peace, from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus**” In Paul’s opening formula, he usually includes a combination of the traditional Hebrew and Greek greetings.

Section of Thanks

1 Thessalonians 1:2-10

1 Thessalonians 1:2-3 “We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers; remembering . . . you work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope in our Lord” In formal letters, after the opening greeting, is a “thanksgiving section.” Paul’s prayer in their behalf begins here (1 Thessalonians 1:2-5). Paul’s expression of gratitude for the saints continues far beyond these first verses to the entire chapter. It speaks of his leadership style, expressing thanks often and prayer. As Christians, our prayers also follow the same pattern with a thanksgiving section following the greetings. Paul’s expression of gratitude is mixed with an exhortation and encouragement.

1 Thessalonians 1:4 “For we know, brothers and sisters loved by God, that he has chosen you . . .” (NIV) The KJV “beloved brethren/*adelphoi*,” refers here to all believers. Paul thanks Jewish and Greek converts, men and women, young and old. He uses this same “*adelphoi*/all believers,” as part of God’s family, fourteen times in this short letter (1 Thessalonians 2:1, 9, 14, 17; 3:7; 4:1, 10, 13; 5:1, 4, 12, 14, 25, 27).

The KJV “election/*eklogé*/chosen you,” is found seven times in the New Testament. It refers to a divine selection or a general choosing out.⁴ In the KJV, “God’s elect,” can be interpreted differently such as with the Reformed and Calvinistic doctrines where it means unconditional election. But Paul’s Greek word choice has a broader meaning.⁵ Many of the King James translators and most of the protestant movements for centuries believed in predestined election. Yet, the Lord revealed a different definition of “election” to the prophet Joseph Smith in D&C 29:7. He restored the meaning of “the elect” as those who “hear my voice and harden not their hearts.” Agency and love function on both sides. The “elect” in this sense are those who seek a closeness with God and humbly receive His direction. God offers humans the gift of His grace, but mortals must choose to receive it.

1 Thessalonians 1:5 “Our gospel came to you not simply with words but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and deep conviction” (NIV) This is Paul’s definition of conversion. The Spirit is a favorite topic and is mentioned in most Epistles. Paul witnesses that the Spirit comes with power and with logical words. The Spirit can speak to our combined hearts and minds verifying truth with a powerful assurance. This was also a major theme of the restored gospel of Jesus Christ (D&C 6:14-15, 23; 8:1, 3, 23, 9:7-9; etc.).

Paul describes the spirit with the word “power.” The Bible couples the “Spirit” or “Holy Ghost” with “power” ten times. Looking for the same pattern in The Book of Mormon, we find “power” linked with God’s Spirit fifty-seven times (seventeen times more frequently than the Bible when evaluated on a per thousand-word basis). The Doctrine and Covenants has an even greater ratio, with thirty-five connections—or twenty-six times the concentration of the Bible and one-and-a-half times more than in The Book of Mormon.

In the Bible, we find the phrase “power of the Holy Ghost” once (Romans 15:13), but in the Book of Mormon, we find it thirty times. This is clearly a message emphasized in the Restoration—the Spirit is powerful.

1 Thessalonians 1:6 “ye became followers of us, and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost” Christianity was not for cowardly converts. Most of the Thessalonian saints had to endure “much affliction” along with the joy of their conversion (Acts 17:6–9). They courageously put their love for the Lord first, and what happened to them second. Before the first century was over, early Christians, including Paul, often faced physical persecution (2 Corinthians 11:24–26). Shortly before he arrived in Thessalonica, he was beaten, chained, and imprisoned for the sake of the Word (Acts 17:5–10). Perhaps this is why Jesus included the last beatitude: “Blessed *are* they which are persecuted for righteousness’ sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:10). Today our religious persecution is more intellectual, emotional, and mental.

1 Thessalonians 1:7–9 “you became a model to all the believers . . . The Lord’s message rang out from you . . . your faith in God has become known everywhere . . . how you turned to God from idols” (NIV) Paul teaches that a good example blesses twice: to the doer and the viewer. One person’s goodness motivates another and becomes a catalyst for positive change. As the Thessalonian saints turned from idolatry, other converts were motivated to turn from worldliness to a godly life.

1 Thessalonians 1:10 “to wait for his Son from heaven” Initially, the early Christians thought that Jesus’ return to rule and reign was imminent (Acts 1:10–11; Revelation 1:1, 3). Even Paul speaks at times as if he expects the millennium to begin in his own lifetime (1 Thessalonians 4:15–17; Hebrews 9:28). But the Lord said that no one knew, “of that day and *that* hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father” (Mark 13:32, 26–31; Acts 1:7). They did not understand that Jesus came in the “meridian of time,” and that He would not rule and reign until after an apostasy and restoration (2 Timothy 4:3). In reality, each person has only their lifetime to wait before he or she will come before the Lord. In this sense, Paul’s exhortation to watchfulness is appropriate for each person in each generation.



Icon of Second Coming, ca. 1700. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

1 THESSALONIANS 2

Paul's Ministry in Thessalonica

1 Thessalonians 2:1-12

1 Thessalonians 2:1 “You know, brothers and sisters, that our visit to you was not without results” (NIV) Paul turns to share a short historical recap of their time together. He believes that the Lord blessed their paths and union. The KJV “vain/*kenke*/empty” can also be translated, “was not a waste of time” (ISV). On the contrary, Paul’s fruitful mission left them with truths and riches.

1 Thessalonians 2:2 “with the help of our God we dared to tell you his gospel in the face of strong opposition” (NIV) Paul refers back to being beaten in Philippi right before he arrived in Thessalonica (Acts 16:11–37) and he probably could have included several other physical persecutions he suffered while preaching. The translation choice of “opposition (RSV, NIV),” or “conflict” (ASV), fits better than “contention” (KJV). Jesus’ first warning to the Nephites included “he that hath the spirit of contention is not of me” (3 Nephi 11:29). Even in places of conflict a disciple can avoid contention.

1 Thessalonians 2:3–4 “We [are not] trying to trick you. On the contrary, we speak as those approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel. We are not trying to please people but God” (NIV) This is a little confusing in the KJV. Paul did not fear what men could do to him. (He obviously endured much physical abuse). He worried about fulfilling his responsibility to God’s call. Joseph Smith verbalized the same thing as a young man, “Who am I that I can withstand God, or why does the world think to make me deny what I have actually seen? . . . I could not deny it, neither dared I do it; at least I knew that by so doing I would offend God, and come under condemnation” (JS-H 1:25). Even outside of missionary labors, disciples must watch to “speak not as pleasing men, but God” (KJV). Paul emphasizes that God will try or prove our hearts. We need to show our devotion to God in all situations.

1 Thessalonians 2:5 “neither at any time used we flattering words, as ye know, nor a cloak of covetousness; God is witness . . .” As God knew, Paul’s deepest motivation was love. His outward appearance was not a pretext or “mask to cover up greed” (NIV). But, as we only have one side of the story, we do not know why Paul defends himself. Was someone attacking his reputation? Was he setting an example to encourage the saints to do likewise?⁶ We learned in Acts 17:13 that earlier, rabble-rousers from Thessalonica had tried to stop Paul’s work.

1 Thessalonians 2:6 “Nor did we seek praise . . . although as apostles of Christ we had authority to demand it” (BSB) In all other attested Pauline epistles, Paul begins with a declaration of his authority and priesthood position. In this letter, he waits until verse 6 to use his title “*apostolos*/apostle/one sent forth with orders/mes-

senger.” He may have waited because the greeting includes Silas and Timothy, who were not apostles.⁷

1 Thessalonians 2:7–12 “. . . you know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children, encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God” (NIV) Paul’s memories of their few weeks together (at least three, Acts 17:2), speaks of his gentle and affectionate approach as a missionary. He felt charity towards his converts. His love led him to risk his life and share his means with them (2 Thessalonians 3:8–9).



Reception and Opposition to the Message

1 Thessalonians 2:13–16

1 Thessalonians 2:13 “when ye received the word of God . . . ye received *it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God*” During Paul’s missionary labors, the Spirit actively testified of the truths he taught. God blessed the believers in Thessalonica with the same witness that He blesses all sincere seekers. The Spirit “worketh” to change and cleanse all those that believe. At times, the Spirit’s witness is undeniable. Other times, the disciples must learn the language of the Spirit in order to understand its witness. Either way, it is rewarding.

1 Thessalonians 2:14–16 “you, brothers and sisters, became imitators of God’s churches in Judea, which are in Christ Jesus: You suffered from your own people the same things those churches suffered from the Jews . . .” (NIV) Persecution became a common consequence for becoming Christian. Both Jews and Gentiles attacked Christians by instigating riots against them, chasing them out of their towns and cities, stoning them, imprisoning them, crucifying them, and it grew worse in the second and third centuries.⁸

Paul’s Desire to Visit Them Again

1 Thessalonians 2:17–20

1 Thessalonians 2:17–18 “brothers and sisters, after we were forced to leave you for a short time (in person, not in heart), we greatly desired and made every effort to return and see you face to face” (CSB) Paul explains that he attempted to return earlier, and he continues to think fondly about his new friends, but unfortunately, “Satan hindered us.” Later in the Epistle, he writes of sending Timothy in his place (1 Thessalonians 3:2).

1 Thessalonians 2:19 “Who is our hope? . . . you yourselves in the presence of our Lord Jesus at His coming” (BSB) Again we see an example where the early saints speak as if the Lord’s Second Coming would come soon.

1 Thessalonians 2:20 “**You are indeed our glory and our joy**” (BSB) Paul’s work and glory (“crown”), is the same as our Heavenly Father’s work— “to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man” (Moses 1:39). Disciples, too, have that as our model.

1 THESSALONIANS 3

Timothy’s Visit

1 Thessalonians 3:1–5

1 Thessalonians 3:1–3a “**when we could bear it no longer, . . . we sent Timothy . . . to strengthen and encourage you in your faith, so that none of you would be shaken by these trials**” (BSB) Paul thought it best to stay and preach in Athens, so he sent his beloved and capable companion, Timothy, back up to Thessalonica to minister to the new branch. Paul knew that new converts needed help to become “established,” and needed “comfort” (KJV). Satan consistently tries to uproot new faith with temptations and doubts. The young converts need regular witnesses of the Spirit to combat the opposition.

1 Thessalonians 3:3b–4 “**we kept warning you that we would suffer persecution; and as you know, it has come to pass**” (BSB) This is an interesting reality of life. We are here for trials, to “learn to distinguish good from evil by our own experience.”⁹ Life is filled with thorns and challenges of all sorts—spiritual, emotional, hunger, and pain—as well as Satan’s temptations. Shortly before Elder Neal Maxwell’s death, during his years of suffering from cancer, he described earthy afflictions as coming from three sources: 1) part of life, 2) tailored made to help us grow, or 3) as a consequence of sin.¹⁰ In order to progress in life, most of us must learn obedience through trials and suffering (Hebrews 5:8). Discipleship includes suffering to help us grow, “as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same” (1 Peter 4:1).

In our dispensation, the Prophet Joseph Smith learned that even “if the very jaws of hell shall gape open the mouth wide after thee, know thou, my son, that all these things shall give thee experience, and shall be for thy good” (D&C 122:7). As recently as April 2019, President Russel M. Nelson warned the saints: “The adversary is quadrupling his efforts to disrupt testimonies and impede the work of the Lord. He is arming his minions with potent weapons to keep us from partaking of the joy and love of the Lord.”¹¹

1 Thessalonians 3:5 “**When I could bear it no longer, I sent to learn about your faith, for fear that somehow the tempter had tempted you**” (ESV) Paul worried about his young flock, so when he couldn’t stand the suspense any longer, he sent Timothy over three-hundred miles north to go check up on the saints, shower them with love, and bolster their faith. The book of Acts says that Paul was only allowed to teach in the synagogue of Thessalonica for three weeks before the persecution began (Acts 17:2). More time may have passed before the

uproar and Paul's nighttime escape, but in either scenario, he was not able to stay long enough to strengthen the saints as he had hoped before persecution started. On Timothy's return visit he may have carried a message from Paul, too.

Timothy's Encouraging Report

1 Thessalonians 3:6-13

1 Thessalonians 3:6-9 “Just now, Timothy has returned from his visit with the good news about your faith, your love, and the fond memories you have preserved . . . we have been reassured” (BSB) Timothy's return and report comforted with the news of the Thessalonians' faithfulness and “charity” (KJV). Half of this letter speaks of the joy of faithfulness.

1 Thessalonians 3:9 “How can we thank God for you in return for all the joy we experience before our God because of you” (CSB) The principle of reciprocity is especially applicable with God. As King Benjamin taught, “if ye do keep his commandments he doth bless you and prosper you” (Mosiah 2:22).

1 Thessalonians 3:10 “we pray . . . [to] supply what is lacking in your faith” (NIV). In the next chapter Paul dedicates the rest of the letter to “supply what is lacking” in their faith. As fellow saints, we covenant to help carry each other's burdens. Perhaps the most important burdens to share are spiritual burdens. To help build each other's faith, disciples can share spiritual experiences, pray together, study together, testify, and encourage each other. Everyone who walks by faith not only builds their own faith, but also impacts those within their sphere of influence. Building our own faith can strengthen our peers' faith.

When a rich young man asked Jesus what he lacked in his faith, the Lord told him to sell his possessions and follow Him (Matthew 19:20). Each disciple should humbly and regularly ask the Lord what is lacking in their faith or how He can encourage them on the covenant path. **Elder Larry R. Lawrence** felt “a perfect time to ask, ‘What lack I yet?’ is when we take the sacrament. The Apostle Paul taught that this is a time for each of us to examine ourselves (1 Corinthians 11:28).”¹²

1 Thessalonians 3:11-13 “Now may our God and Father himself and our Lord Jesus . . .” Paul's sincere love spills out into a sincere prayer or blessing. The prayer divides his Epistle into two sections. The prayer covers the next three verses:

- “May our God . . . clear the way for us to come to you”
- “May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else”
- “May he strengthen your hearts so that you will be blameless and holy . . . when our Lord Jesus comes.”

This blessing or prayer is another example of how the early saints expected a quick return of Jesus in his glorified state surrounded with His saints. We feel a sense of immediacy in all their writings. They only focused on existing problems and on preparing for Jesus' Second Coming (i.e. 1 Thessalonians 4:14–15). For example, the *Didache* from between AD 80 and 140 reads: “be ready, for you do not know the hour in which our Lord comes.” And Cyprian from AD 250, “Already His second coming draws near to us . . . He will soon come from heaven for the punishment of the devil and for the judgment of the human race, with the force of an avenger and with the power of a judge”¹³

PART 2: ENCOURAGEMENT FOR THE SAINTS TO PROGRESS

Live to Please God: Sanctification and Love

1 Thessalonians 4:1–12

1 Thessalonians 4:1 “As for other matters, brothers and sisters, we instructed you how to live in order to please God” (NIV) Paul turns to the main purpose of his Epistle: What is lacking in their faith. Paul introduces what he wants to say with a transition: “It is in order then . . . we beseech and exhort” (JB2000), or “Finally. . . we ask and encourage you” (BSB), or “Furthermore, we beseech . . . and exhort you” (KJV). The goal is to live worthy or “it behooves you to walk and to please God” (BLB). The young saints have already felt the witness of the truth, so Paul now encourages them to live more and more by the Spirit and in keeping with the law of the Gospel. Throughout the New Testament, “walk/ *peripateō*” means in an ethical sense, “conduct my life, live.” Paul then dives into five topics that stemmed from either their questions, what Timothy observed, or the Spirit’s direction.

1 Thessalonians 4:2 “you know what instructions we gave you by the authority of the Lord Jesus” (NIV, BSB) Paul stresses that the “commandments” (KJV) or “precepts” (DRB) he teaches are from Jesus not from just the missionaries or fellow humans.

Sexual Immorality

1 Thessalonians 4:3–8

1 Thessalonians 4:3–4 “It is God’s will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality; that each of you should learn to control your own body” (NIV) Paul begins with a straight-line approach. It is for their own good and sanctification. (*Sanctification* is the process of becoming a Saint, holy and pure.¹⁴) The first issue is to avoid “fornication/*porneia*” (including incest and adultery, etc.) The law of chastity must have been a real problem in the Greco-Roman world as Paul repeats it in nine of his fourteen letters.

Biblical translators debate verse four more than any other in the letter. The KJV phrase, “possess his vessel,” meant controlling one’s own body. Other translations read: RSV “take a wife for himself in holiness and honor.” NEB “gain mastery over his body, to hallow and honor it.” NIV “control his own body in a way that is holy and honorable.” LV “keep clear of all sexual sin so that each of you will marry in holiness and honor.”

1 Thessalonians 4:5–6 “not in passionate lust like the pagans, who do not know God; and that in this matter no one should wrong or take advantage of a brother or sister” (NIV), Paul contrasts heathen immorality with Christian conduct. He addressed “selfish lust” (JB) in light of the heathen practices of “sacred fornication.”¹⁵ Paul also repeats that God will “punish all those who commit such sins.” He repeatedly warned them (“forewarned you” KJV), that all will be held accountable for sexual impropriety against another.

1 Thessalonians 4:7–8 God did not call us to be impure . . . therefore, anyone who rejects this instruction does not reject a human being but God” (NIV) Christians have been cleansed through Christ’s at-one-ment, and have the responsibility to keep themselves clean and holy, in order to receive the Spirit and act as His servants. If one “disregards” (RSV) or “despiseth,” (KJV) or “objects” to (JB) this counsel, that person has offended God. The Holy Spirit is offended by uncleanness and cannot dwell in unclean temples, hence, the Spirit is lost.

Charity and Self-Sufficiency

1 Thessalonians 4:9–12

1 Thessalonians 4:9–10 “Now about your love for one another we do not need to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God . . . yet we urge you, brothers and sisters, to do so more and more” (NIV) Of the four or five Greek words for love, Paul chooses “*agapá*/charity” which he includes in the hymn to charity in 1 Corinthians 13:4–7. Jesus’ foremost teaching was the importance of love. As converts become more Christlike, they strive to develop charity more and more.

1 Thessalonians 4:11 “aspire to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business, and to work with your own hands . . . that you may lack nothing” (NKJV) Paul encourages living a calm and quiet life for the intent of being a good neighbor to Christians and non-Christians (v. 12, “outsiders” BLB, or “those without,” KJV). Yet, minding one’s own business does not mean we must be silent and cloistered. Often, he encourages saints to “serve one another” (Galatians 5:13; also, Romans 7:6; 9:12; 1 Timothy 6:2; etc.). Paul’s counsel to work with your hands is in direct opposition to the teachings of the Epicureans who scorned work. It also addressed the Greco-Roman patronage system that allowed the elite on the ladder of social hierarchy to have lower class servants and slaves do all their work—including feeding, washing, dressing, and performing all other menial labor.

Paul may also be encouraging an important aspect of the Law of Consecration. The early Christians in Jerusalem lived this law, and it was taught across Christ’s churches (Acts 2:44; Romans 15:26; Galatians 2:10; etc.). All

worked for the benefit of the whole. Perhaps some slacked, attempting to live off the generosity of everyone else. Paul has already written that brotherly love and hard work go hand in hand (1 Thessalonians 2:8–9). It also could refer to carrying for one another and sharing burdens. If we love our neighbor, we will do our share. It may have also been a lesson on personal preparedness. Consecration and preparation go hand in hand. The bottom line is to help each other to become a Zion's people with “no poor among” us (Moses 7:18).

The Righteous Dead Will Come when Jesus Returns

1 Thessalonians 4:13–18

1 Thessalonians 4:13 “Brothers and sisters, we do not want you to be uninformed about those who sleep in death, so that you do not grieve like the rest of mankind” (NIV) Paul addresses one of their questions about grieving for their departed loved ones. To “sleep,” is a euphemism for death that even Jesus used (John 11:11–13). Christians understand that Jesus will awaken them from death to immortality. Death in the ancient culture a common experience for most ancient people. Death of a child was more common than an infant living beyond age ten.¹⁶ After death, the Jews and Greeks mourning practices included long and loud shrieking. Their culture interpreted a demonstration of sorrow as dressing in sack cloth, overtly weeping, screaming, putting dirt on



The Resurrection by Sebastiano Ricci, ca. 1715. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

one's head, throwing dirt in the air, and making a theatrical demonstration of remorse. Jews would hire a female mourner to dramatize mourning with hours of wailing and throwing dirt in the air. The Jewish Mishnah records: "Even the poorest in Israel should hire not less than two flutes and one wailing woman."¹⁷ To Paul this excessive ranting did not demonstrate a belief in the resurrection.

1 Thessalonians 4:14–15 "through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep" (ESV) Paul tries to correct another misunderstanding of the early saints here. When Jesus returns at the Second Coming, he will be accompanied by the righteous who have passed from their second estate. Paul teaches what he learned from Jesus' words. The text describes the saints will still be alive when Jesus' returns, "we," assuming even Paul will participate. But the JST took out Paul's "we" (and in verse 17), and replaced it with "they" who are alive. This allows for a much longer period before Jesus' Second Coming. Nonetheless, the early Christians thought that Jesus' Second Coming in their lifetime or at least soon.

1 Thessalonians 4:16 "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" At the Second Coming, the soul stirring call of the archangel (Adam, or Michael as he is called in heaven) will be heard as a "loud command" (NIV). The "trump of God" may refer to the Jewish priests who blew shofars at the temple (Ezra 3:10). Paul also teaches that the Christians will rise first in the Resurrection.

1 Thessalonians 4:17–18 "After that, we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will always be with the Lord" (BSB) "Caught up" in Latin is "*rapemur*" which is where we get the English identification of "the rapture" colloquially used for the Second Coming of the Lord. The righteous will be caught up with those already resurrected. (This imagery is also found in Daniel 7:13; and D&C 77:12). Part of the finishing of the saints' faith was to share this encouragement of the hope of God's Plan of Salvation. Paul clarified this for the Thessalonians probably because they were confused or were asking how the dead would come forth.

1 THESSALONIANS 5

The Timing of the Second Coming

1 Thessalonians 5:1-11

1 Thessalonians 5:1 "Now, brothers and sisters, about times and dates . . . you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night" (NIV) Paul's eschatological message was already well known by them. The "times and the seasons" (KJV) refer to when the Lord will return and reign in glory. Paul refuses to

even discuss the timing with them—it was unpredictable. Jesus taught a similar message in Matthew 24:36–7, 43 and Luke 12:44 JST. There are many times when Paul may have heard of Jesus’ words—including his fifteen days visiting with Peter (Galatians 1:18). Paul uses the image of “a thief in the night” to underscore that those who are not watching will be caught unprepared. That day was prophesied clear back in Amos 5:18.

1 Thessalonians 5:3 “when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape” Even though the Lord’s coming will be unexpected, Paul’s choice of imagery, a woman in labor,” has many predictable warnings (her size, months gestation, her pain, speed of contractions, baby’s position, etc.). Likewise, the timing of the Second Coming can generally be estimated as when the signs are fulfilled. The same imagery was used often in the Old Testament, including Isaiah 13:8; 21:3; Jeremiah 6:24; 49:24; and Micah 4:10. Jesus used it for his death (John 16:21).

1 Thessalonians 5:4–5 “. . . this day should [not] surprise you like a thief. You are all children of the light” (NIV) As followers of the Light, Christians are given apostles and the Spirit as their guide, so they do not have to be unprepared or unexpected. The symbols of light and fire go together with the Spirit. As Amos taught, “Surely, the Lord GOD will do nothing, but he revealeth his secret unto his servants the prophets” (Amos 3:7).

1 Thessalonians 5:6–8a “Let us not sleep, as *do* others; but let us watch and be sober” Paul plays with the symbolism of spiritual light and darkness in the setting of day and night, as Jesus did, as recorded in the Gospels (Matthew 6:23; John 1:5; 12:35, 46; etc.). Children of light are like a light house. They must warn others of Satan’s temptations by staying “alert” (NASB), and use “self-control” (CSB) to be ready.

1 Thessalonians 5:8b “putting on the breastplate of faith and love; and for an helmet, the hope of salvation” Paul draws from military protection to symbolize how the saints can defend themselves in the spiritual warfare against the adversary. President Russel M. Nelson has used the same imagery since being called as the prophet.¹⁸ Here Paul uses only two pieces of spiritual armor: 1) the breastplate as a defensive shield built on our faith and love, and 2) the helmet as the hope of salvation. Paul uses this image from Isaiah 59:17; “He put on righteousness like a breastplate, and the helmet of salvation on His head.” Paul’s most in depth description of the armor of God is in Ephesians 6:10–17.

1 Thessalonians 5:9–11 “God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord . . . Wherefore comfort yourselves together, and edify one another” Paul explains that his fellow disciples should rejoice in the Lord’s gift of salvation, and not spend needless energy worrying about God’s timing or wrath. Rather than worry if “we wake or sleep,” when the Lord comes to reign in glory, is not that issue. Paul wants to make sure saints have kept their covenants so that they may “live together.” He hopes that the saints will love and support each other to “build each other up” (NIV).



The Second Coming by Georgio Klontzas, ca. 16th century. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

Relationships with Each Other

1 Thessalonians 5:12-15

1 Thessalonians 5:12-13 “We ask you, brothers and sisters, to acknowledge those who work hard among you, who care for you in the Lord and who admonish you. Hold them in the highest regard in love because of their work” (NIV) These two verses encourage the saints to respect and “know” (KJV) their fellow leaders who labor in their behalf. Other translations refer to having “respect” (RSV), for the leaders, and to “appreciate” (NAS), and “be considerate” (JB) of them. Back biting or complaining is not compatible with God’s Kingdom. This does not mean that the leaders are without fault and need for improvement. But as fellow laborers, the saints need to encourage, sustain and support them.

1 Thessalonians 5:14 “We urge you, brothers and sisters, warn those who are idle and disruptive, encourage the disheartened, help the weak, be patient with everyone” (NIV) Paul lightly touched on another problem here (and even stronger in his next letter to the Thessalonians). There were some who were “idle and disruptive.” Unlike their cultural hierarchy that allowed for some to not work, in the church, everyone needs to work hard. In the larger context, Paul addresses the need to contribute to the welfare of the whole church. Especially, the “feble-minded,” “timid,” or “apprehensive” (KJV, NIV JB). Paul knew that those who lacked courage to testify, or even live the gospel, needed encouragement and support. He asks the saints to be patient with each other (and I add, *as well as with ourselves*).

1 Thessalonians 5:15 “Make sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong, but always strive to do what is good for each other” (NIV) Paul closes his subsection on relationships with more of Jesus’ teachings (which also found in Proverbs 20:22). No longer does Paul encourage, “an eye for an eye” but he follows Jesus’ teaching, “I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you” both in and out of the faith (Matthew 5:44).

Relationships with God

1 Thessalonians 5:16-22

1 Thessalonians 5:16-22 Paul concludes with ways to increase our relationship with God.

- **“Rejoice evermore”/ “Be joyful”** (ISV) The message to always praise God keeps us faith focused.
- **“Pray without ceasing”/ “pray constantly”** (CES) A prayerful mind tethers us to God all day. President Ezra Taft Benson explained, “Pray always means to pray regularly, consistently, day in and day out. And, also have the Spirit of prayer always in your heart, so that your thoughts, words and actions are always such as will please Him who is Eternal.”¹⁹
- **“In every thing give thanks”/ “Give thanks in every circumstance”** (BSB) . . . especially for trials. Feeling gratitude is a wonderful way to feel good. I am more satisfied with life, with people, even with the weather, when I have a grateful heart. Selfishness is the antithesis of gratitude. Gratitude can fill one with the love

of God and remove anger.

- **“Quench not the Spirit”/ “Don’t stifle the Spirit”** (CSB). Just as a blacksmith quenches hot metal in water, our hearts become hard when we ignore the Spirit, like a spark or fire. Sometimes we douse the Spirit by ignoring or misinterpreting promptings. We extinguish the Spirit by unkind thoughts, words, inattention, and fear. Similarly our thoughts, words, and focus can enflame our spiritual sparks as we seek inspiration.
- **“Despise not prophesyings”/ “Do not reject prophecy”** (ABPE). We hear these regularly at general conference.²⁰
- **“Prove all things”** This is becoming more and more important with information flying at us from our every click. Especially examine attacks that pull down our faith. Seek the gift of discernment by asking, “Is this idea from God or the adversary?”
- **“Hold fast that which is good”** As in Lehi’s vision, hold onto the iron rod, or the word of God.
- **“Abstain from all appearance of evil”** Abstaining from all of evil’s forms is getting harder and harder.

Paul’s Final Blessing

1 Thessalonians 5:23–28

1 Thessalonians 5:23–24 “**May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord**” (NIV) Paul concludes with a blessing or prayer for their souls. He prays with all the love of a parent praying for his children. Equally as important, he prays for what is most important in their eternal well-being. Rather than reviewing some of their needs, Paul asks God for what they need most for their spiritual wellbeing. God is “faithful” and will fulfill all his promises, so we too must ask for what is most important in our prayers.

1 Thessalonians 5:25–27 “**Brothers and sisters, pray for us. Greet all God’s people with a holy kiss . . . have this letter read to all the brothers and sisters**” (NIV) Four times Paul encourages this greeting. A “holy kiss” in early Christianity was not a Greek custom. This tradition may be why a few European Catholic countries greet friends by touching cheeks and kissing the air (*la bise*). Although the Joseph Smith Translation changed this verse it to read “with a holy salutation,” we still find “holy kiss” repeated in four other Epistles (Romans 16:16; 1 Corinthians 16:20; 2 Corinthians 13:12; 1 Peter 5:14).

1 Thessalonians 5:28 “**The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen**” Grace is the precious gift of forgiveness from God; it is a gift of Himself received through the cleansing of His Holy Spirit. We can share it with others as we forgive them and share God’s love. The post script was not part of the original Epistle, but added much later by a scribe.

2 THESSALONIANS

Ca. AD 50–51

Three Challenges: Persecution, Christ's Second Coming, Working Together

Outline of 2 Thessalonians

- 1:1–4 Salutation and Thanksgiving
- 1:5–10 Persevere through Persecutions
- 1:11–1 First Prayer for Them
- 2: 1–15 The Second Coming
- 2:1–3 Apostasy
- 2:4–12 Satan's Power
- 2:16–17 Second Prayer for Them
- 3:1–5 Request Prayers
- 3:6–15 Need for All to Work
- 3:16–18 Third Prayer for Them
- 3:17–18 Salutation (4th C)

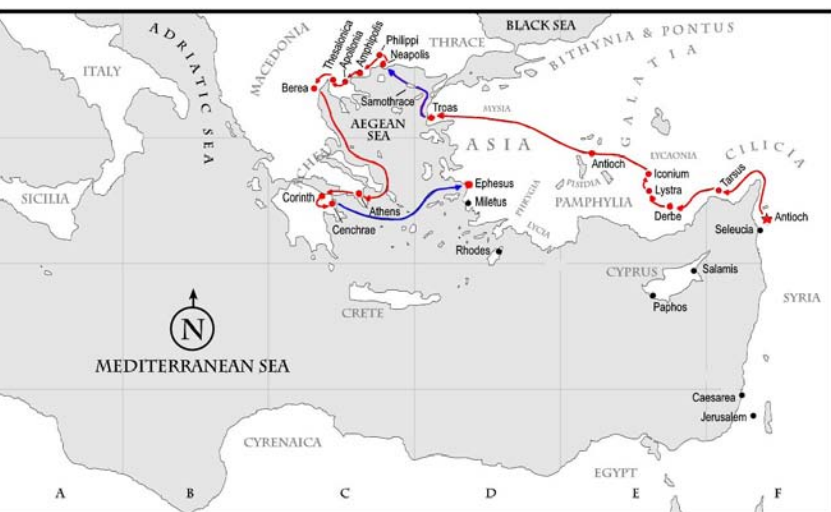
BACKGROUND:

Shortly after Paul wrote his first letter to the Thessalonians, Timothy returned with the news that the saints were struggling even more with three of the same problems: persecution, fear about the Second Coming, and idleness or disruptive behaviors. Paul addresses the three issues a three-sectioned letter—each ending with a short prayer for the saints.

Salutation and Thanksgiving

2 Thessalonians 1:1–4

2 Thessalonians 1:1 “Paul and Silvanus, and Timotheus, the servants of God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ . . .” (JST) Paul opens his letter with his standard Greek greeting. For the second and last time Silvanus (Silas) joins him as the co-author. This helps us date the epistle to the second mission where the two were companions. The JST re-arranged the KJV greeting and added the important title of “servants,” to the missionaries. This is also the title Jesus chose for Himself during His ministry (“The Son of Man came . . . to serve” (Matthew 20:28, WEB; Mark 10:45).²¹ A servant of the Lord is the greatest role a disciple can fill.





2 Thessalonians 1:2 “Grace unto you, and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ” Paul’s entreaty for grace and peace is a gift from “our” Father in Heaven. In every Epistle that Paul wrote to a group of saints, he began by expressing his testimony that God is “our Father” (Romans 1:7; 1 Corinthians 1:3; 2 Corinthians 1:2; Galatians 1:3–4; Ephesians 1:2; Philippians 1:2; Colossians 1:1; 1 Thessalonians 1:1; and 2 Thessalonians 1:1; as well as many times in between). The restoration brought back a literal and spiritual interpretation of this that now every primary child sings, “I am a child of God.”

2 Thessalonians 1:3–4 “We . . . thank God for you, brothers and sisters . . . your faith is growing more and more, and the love all of you have for one another is increasing . . . we boast about your perseverance and faith in all the persecutions and trials you are enduring” (NIV) The thanksgiving portion of Paul’s opening is only two verses this time. He acknowledges their endurance during tribulations. Difficult as it was, these saints increased their faith, charity, and patience during their persecutions. Paul spends the first third of his letter encouraging them to draw closer to God during their trials. Earlier in Acts, we learned that the saints in Thessalonica suffered under the hand of the Jews (“Jews were jealous; so, they rounded up some bad characters from the marketplace, formed a mob and started a riot in the city” Acts 17:5, NIV).

Persevere through Persecutions

2 Thessalonians 1:5-10

2 Thessalonians 1:5 “**This is evidence of the righteous judgment of God that you may be made worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are suffering**” (ESV) The saints persecution appears to have intensified. Paul comforts them with the hope that God’s justice will come to bear. It is also healing for them to rely on God to take care of the justice. This way the victims can turn the punishment over to God and not hold onto feelings of anger or vengeance, which will thwart their healing. The saints were suffering because of their beliefs in God’s kingdom, but suffering also helps refine us for the Kingdom. This verse may be misinterpreted as suggesting that suffering is required. Even though suffering is often addressed in the New Testament (Acts 5:40–42; Romans 8:17; Philippians 1:29; 3:10; 1 Peter 2:20–23; etc.), nowhere is innocent suffering encouraged.

This verse can also be understood that by exercising a patient attitude while enduring persecution, the Lord will see it as a token of their worthiness to enter His Kingdom. Suffering for the Kingdom’s sake can be a time of refining our souls, as Jesus “learned obedience from what He suffered. And, having been made perfect, He became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey Him” (Hebrews 5:8–9, BSB).

2 Thessalonians 1:6–8 “**since indeed God deems it just to repay with affliction those who afflict you, and to grant rest with us to you who are afflicted, when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire inflicting vengeance**” (ESV) The hope of justice and peace when the Savior returns has sustained many suffering servants of God. Richard Anderson explains, “Judgment implies freedom to make choices, so the goal of Paul’s letter is stronger faith and plus righteous action.”²²

When Jesus comes again the earth will receive a baptism by fire to cleanse it from the wicked (Joel 2:30; Malachi 3:2; Matthew 13:40; 2 Peter 3:10; D&C 64:24). Those “that know not God” (2 Thessalonians 1:8 KJV) may include those who refuse to know and obey Him (Romans 1:19–21, 28–29).

2 Thessalonians 1:9–10 “**They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord . . . on the day He Comes to Be Glorified**” (NIV) The wicked will receive their just reward. In addition to their “destruction,” they will also be excluded from the presence of the Lord. However, the Lord taught Joseph Smith that after the wicked are punished and acknowledge Jesus as the Christ, they will also enjoy a kingdom of glory (D&C 76:109–112). At the Second Coming when Jesus will be glorified, the righteous believers who have passed on and those still on the earth will add to His glory, as God’s work and glory are His saints’ eternal life (Moses 1:39). Jesus will be “regarded with wonder” (BSB), or “marveled at” (ESV), or “admired,” (KJV), by the believers who see His glory.

Paul's First Prayer or Blessing

2 Thessalonians 1:11-12

2 Thessalonians 1:11 “we pray always for you, that He may count you worthy of the calling of our God . . . and work of faith with power” (BLB) Our leaders (on both sides of the veil) likewise pray for us to be worthy of this calling to prepare for the return of the Lord as King. The Lord's Spirit acts as a mantle that empowers His servants to do His work.

2 Thessalonians 1:12 “the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and ye in him” It is a beautiful reciprocal relationship. The name of the Lord may be glorified in us. As part of our sacramental covenant to take upon His name, we can radiate His light. When saints live righteously, they will receive God's blessings and add glory to Him.

2 THESSALONIANS 2

Preparing for the Second Coming

2 Thessalonians 2:1-15

2 Thessalonians 2:1-2 “Concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to him, we ask you, brothers and sisters, not to become easily unsettled or alarmed by the teaching allegedly from us” (NIV) Paul wrote his previous letter to the Thessalonians, in a large part, to clarify the misunderstanding that the Lord's Second Coming was imminent, “no man knows the season” (1 Thessalonians 4:13-17). Here, it sounds as if others continued to disrupt the persecuted saints with false ideas. Paul basically says, do not believe everything you hear, “except ye receive it from us” (JST). The false prophecy “purported” (RSV) that the Second Coming was just around the corner, or had already happened and they missed it. The spreader of these false ideas is clearer in the Greek, which removes the responsibility for the idea away from the author, Paul, and onto another.

2 Thessalonians 2:3 “Let no man deceive you by any means: for there shall come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition” (JST) This is the clearest prophesy of a Christian apostasy in the New Testament (also see Acts 20:29 “grievous wolves enter in among you”). The Greek word for “falling away/*apostasias*,” is a strong word which is translated, “rebellion” (RSV, NIV), “revolt” (JB), “mass apostasy” (NAB). The apostasy was not a passive movement, but rather a planned defection or desertion, to oppose authority—by the devil. He is also described as “that man of sin”(KJV), “the Rebel, the Lost One” (JB), the “man of lawlessness” (NIV, NAS, RSV), and “wickedness” (NEB). In this verse, “the son of perdition,” is Satan. In Latin, perdition is to destroy.

Remember that this is only Paul's second letter. The apostasy is already underfoot within two decades of Jesus' ministry, resurrection and forty-day-ministry. It was neither passive nor gradual. Jesus foretold it, and so did Paul (Matthew 24:24). Satan's and his minions work overtime at their counterfeiting business.

2 Thessalonians 2:4 “He will oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshiped, so that he sets himself up in God's temple, proclaiming himself to be God” (NIV). The verse uncovers Satan as the great usurper and counterfeit. Almost always Paul uses “temple” figuratively, occasionally as the body, but usually as the church.²³ Here Satan is trying to usurp the place of God.

2 Thessalonians 2:5–6 “when I was yet with you, I told you these things . . . And now ye know . . . that he might be revealed in his time” Paul had previously warned them, but they mixed up their messages between true apostles and false teachers. Paul had taught that Jesus' glorious return was not impending, but the apostasy was.

2 Thessalonians 2:7 “The mystery of iniquity doth already work, and he it is who now worketh, and Christ suffereth him to work until the time is fulfilled that he shall be taken out of the way” (JST) The JST kept the Lord Christ in control, allowing opposition and temptation to separate out the wheat from the tares.

NIV reads: “For the secret power of lawlessness, is already at work; but the one [God] who now holds it back will continue to do so till he [Satan] is taken out of the way.” God's servants (like Paul), are also restraining Satan and his falsehoods. But it is not until Jesus comes to “annihilate [Satan] by the majesty of His arrival” (BSB) that Satan will finally be conquered.

2 Thessalonians 2:8 “The coming of the lawless one will be accompanied by the working of Satan, with every kind of power, sign, and false wonder” (BSB) Satan's use of power and signs will deceive even the elect (Mark13:22). This is why President Nelson has emphasized, “in coming days, it will not be possible to survive spiritually without the guiding, directing, comforting, and constant influence of the Holy Ghost.” He said that as we practiced and worked at it, “day after day, month after month, year after year,” we would “grow into the principle of revelation.”²⁴ We know the ending though. God will defeat evil. Jesus will come with celestial beings and destroy all things telestial by His glory (D&C 5:19).

2 Thessalonians 2:9–10 “Yea, the Lord, even Jesus, whose coming is not until after there cometh a falling away, but the working of Satan withal power and signs and lying wonders . . . because they received not the love of the truth.” (JST) The prophet felt inspired to add a repeated warning on the Apostasy led by Satan. The adversary has only limited powers, although his counterfeits are deceiving. As we saw with Moses at Pharaoh's court, the devil has the ability to imitate God's miracles (Exodus 7:11, 22, 8:7). Satan also has some limited power

over the elements (D&C 61:14–19). He is a master of deceit and can even appear as an angel of light (D&C 129:8). He can counterfeit the gift of tongues and visions, but not the gifts of healing, hope, and charity.

In this dispensation, the Prophet Joseph Smith repeatedly preached that clever demonic forces counterfeited the truth and perpetuated their false ideas, so that everyone must carefully guard against being deceived.²⁵ In 1842, he published two editorials: “Try the Spirits,” and “The Gift of the Holy Ghost” that addressed the different supernatural influences and need for vigilance.²⁶ He spoke on the discerning of spirits more than on any other topic and felt that its need was paramount.²⁷

Nothing is a greater injury to the children of men than to be under the influence of a false spirit when they think they have the Spirit of God. Thousands have felt the influence of its terrible power and baneful effects. Long pilgrimages have been undertaken, penances endured, and pain, misery and ruin have followed in their train; nations have been convulsed, kingdoms overthrown, provinces laid waste, and blood, carnage and desolation are habiliments [*sic*] in which it has been clothed.²⁸

Similarly, Brigham Young taught, “In all this the power of the devil is limited; the power of God is unlimited.”²⁹

2 Thessalonians 2:11–12 “And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie that they all might be damned who believed not the truth” Damned means stopped in progression. It comes from finding pleasure in unrighteousness—our society’s specialty. In many translations these two verses sound as if God has predestined some people to damnation. This Calvinistic interpretation is wrong.³⁰ God does not delude us, or act in any way out of spite or trickery. Instead, we humans are deceived to believing Satan’s lies.

2 Thessalonians 2:13 “We ought always to thank God for you, brothers and sisters loved by the Lord, because God chose you as firstfruits to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit” (NIV) Paul thanks the Lord for the steadfastness of these new converts. He refers to them as “firstfruits,” which were offered as a temple sacrifice of the most cherished fruit of the season (Exodus 23:16, 19; 34:22, 26; etc.). Paul credits the Spirit’s work of cleansing that purifies believers through the process of sanctification towards exaltation. God chose them



Lucifer by Franz Stuck, 1890. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

because they accepted the truth and believed the Spirit. However, that is not the message in several translations (like the KJV). Some interpret this verse as laced with the Protestant theology of God's elect as saved unconditionally.³¹

Like the early Christians, the early saints in our dispensation also expected the Lord to come sooner than later. Brigham cautioned them,

Do not be too anxious for the Lord to hasten this work. Let our anxiety be centered upon this one thing, the sanctification of our won hearts, the purifying of our affections, the preparing of ourselves for the approach of the events that are hastening upon us. This should be our concern, this should be our study, this should be our daily prayer...Seek to have the Spirit of Christ that we may wait patiently the time of the Lord, and prepare ourselves the times that are coming. This is our duty.³²



Virgin and Child, Prophets, Apostles, and Saints, ca. 14th century. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

2 Thessalonians 2:14–15 “He called you to . . . share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ . . . stand firm and hold fast to the teachings we passed on to you” (NIV) The saints must hold onto the teachings of living prophets and apostles. Our God calls many, but Joseph taught that only few are chosen, because of unrighteous dominion (D&C 121:39–42). Paul’s words were to comfort the saints who had been persecuted, and fearful. The whole section on the apostasy offered hope to Paul’s audience as it “wove the plight of the church into a

larger drama. We must respond to life's seemingly meaninglessness with a perspective that places life in a larger drama.”³³ Fortunately, life is not a one-act play. We must see the larger picture to see our Savior's mercy and the Father's grand plan.

Second Prayer or Blessing

2 Thessalonians 2:16-17

2 Thessalonians 2:16-17 “. . . God our Father, who loved us and by his grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope, encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good deed and word” (NIV) To close this section Paul records a prayer or blessing to the saints. Their fears associated with the calamities of the Lord's Second Coming, Satan's deceptions, and the looming Apostasy, were kept in perspective with the hope that God's love encourages hope and positive action. Paul weaves the need for good works and faith together in and out of his Epistle to the Thessalonians.

2 THESSALONIANS 3

Request for Prayer

2 Thessalonians 3:1-5

2 Thessalonians 3:1-3 “Finally, pray for us, brothers and sisters, that the Lord's message may spread . . . that we may be delivered from . . . evil people . . . and he will strengthen you and protect you from the evil one” (NET). Paul opens the last third of his letter with a short request for prayers before diving into the last problem. His request to deliver them from evil echoes the Lord's example to pray “lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil” (Matthew 6:13). This may also equate to asking for the gift of discernment which identifies evil in order to avoid it.

2 Thessalonians 3:4-5 “ye both do and will do the things which we command you. And the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God, and into the patient waiting for Christ” Paul's request shows that his desires are spiritually grounded. He asks the Lord to bless them with the spiritual gifts of “love/agape/charity” and patience. He has no requests for physical safety or meeting his daily needs, but Paul prays that the saints can become more Christlike. He focuses on what is most important from an eternal perspective, and what is best for them to develop.

Need for All to Work—No Idleness

2 Thessalonians 3:6-15

2 Thessalonians 3:6-7 “we command you, brothers and sisters, to keep away from every believer who is idle and disruptive . . . follow our example. We were not idle when we were with you” (NIV) There must have

been a problem with those who were not working or disrupting the Christian community. The word for “idle” is actually “*ataktós/disorderly*.” The context suggests this refers to those who refuse to work and live the laws of the gospel. This may have been part of the culture where wealthy Roman patronage expected servants to do their work, or perhaps it stemmed from expecting Jesus’ immanent coming. It would have been a further problem if the saints were trying to live the law of consecration as discussed in 1 Thessalonians 4:14, as the saints shared all things in common in Jerusalem (Acts 2:44). Everyone needs to work to follow the ideal example of the Lord serving others and making the world a better place.

2 Thessalonians 3:8–9 “nor did we eat anyone’s bread free of charge, but worked with labor and toil night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you” (NKJV) As an example, Paul worked for his own wages while he was in Thessalonica. Elsewhere we learn that Paul was a tent maker or leather worker (Acts 18:1–3; 2 Corinthians 11:9). He uses a Semitic idiom here “to eat someone’s bread” means to earn a living (see Genesis 3:19; 2 Kings 9:7). This verse provides the context to define that the problem was more with idleness than disorder.

2 Thessalonians 3:10 “we were with you, we commanded you this: If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat” (NKJV) The word Paul uses for “commanded/*paragelló*,” is also used for military and court orders. He really means command! He is not referring to the sick or those who cannot work, but those who are unwilling to work. If they were living a form of the Law of Consecration, it would have required everyone to contribute what they could for the community to be sustainable.

2 Thessalonians 3:11 “We hear . . . they are not busy; they are busybodies” (NIV) This play on words in Greek is also “they may have.” Not only do the idle not cover their own costs, but they also distract others with their behaviors.

2 Thessalonians 3:12 “Such people we command and urge in the Lord Jesus Christ to settle down and earn the bread they eat” (NIV)

2 Thessalonians 3:13 “brothers and sisters, never tire of doing what is good” I love this verse. It is the adversary who discourages us in doing good. It sounds like one of our LDS prophet’s statements, “Life is like my shoes to be worn out in doing good.” We can obey all that God has commanded us, just like Nephi. I only become overwhelmed when I have too much of worldliness creeping in on the things that I am commanded to do.

2 Thessalonians 3:14–15 “Take special note of anyone who does not obey . . . Do not associate with them . . . Yet do not regard them as an enemy, but warn them as you would a fellow believer” (NIV). This counsel may sound harsh at first, but I really feel that Paul is wise in saying, “choose your examples, and gently encourage the

members who need to be corrected.” Disruptive members, or those who do not follow their leaders, often lead others astray. To protect the other saints, Elder McConkie taught, “Enemies from within, traitors to the cause, cultist who pervert the doctrines and practices often draw others away with them, and added souls lose their anticipated inheritance in the heavenly kingdom . . . the course of wisdom is to avoid them as Paul directs, and leave them in the hands of the Lord.”³⁴

Paul’s Closing Blessing and Personal Greeting

2 Thessalonians 3:16–18

2 Thessalonians 3:16 “Now the Lord of peace himself give you peace always” This blessing or prayer is significant in light of the persecution and fears. Even in times of persecution and eager anticipation, the saints can be at peace as they trust in God and allow the Spirit to guide their thoughts and actions. At His last supper, Jesus promised his disciples gathered in the upper room, “my peace I give unto you” (John 14:27). The Spirit also witnesses with peace (D&C 6:23). What a beautiful gift.

2 Thessalonians 3:17–18 “salutation of Paul with mine own hand, which is the token in every epistle: so I write. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ *be* with you all. Amen” The handwriting probably changed from a scribe to Paul’s shorter note. However, the italicized post script was added by a fourth century scribe, and it may be wrong as Corinth fits more closely into the account from Acts.

Header Image: Mosaic of Christ Pantocrator in the baptistry of Sav Giovanni, Florence, Italy, ca. 1300. Image via Wikimedia Commons.

ENDNOTES

1. Abraham J. Malherbe, *Anchor Bible: The Letters to the Thessalonians* (NYC, NY: Doubleday, 2000), 14.
2. *Ibid*, 14–15.
3. These are the books that have the most evidence of being written by Paul without as much editing or scribe interference. The other Pauline Epistles still may have been outlined, approved, or signed by Paul Paul's scribes may have been strictly following Paul's words (Romans 16:22) or allowed some freedom (i.e. Ephesians). But these seven are the standard by which the others are measured (i.e. vocabulary, style, etc.). This list is in the order that they were probably written, at least according to our best historical estimation.
4. Thayer's Greek Lexicon, Strong's Concordance of the New Testament #1589: *ἐκλογή*. "particularly that by which he determined to bless certain persons through Christ" (Romans 11:28), "according to an election which is due to grace, or a gracious election" (Romans 11:5). In addition, see Acts 9:15; Romans 11:7, 28; 1 Thessalonians 1:4; 2 Pe 1:2.
5. As discussed in Romans 8:33, "God's elect," the main five points of Reformed and Calvinistic theology stem from five points known as TULIP:
 - Total depravity (from birth to adulthood, all are in sin until God elects them for regeneration)
 - Unconditional election (predestined for Eternal Life without any effort, only by God's choice)
 - Limited atonement (the Savior's atonement only covered the few whom God elected)
 - Irresistible Grace (humans have no ability or agency to resist His choice of election through grace)
 - Perseverance of the Saints (those whom God elects are the saints who will persevere eternally)By the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the new Colonies were saturated with this belief. The majority of Americans believed in Calvinism's passive election waiting and willing to submit oneself to Christ and seeking the Holy Spirit's call. Mark A. Noll, *America's God: from Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln* (NYC, NY: Oxford University Press, 2002), 166. Also, see Lynne H. Wilson, "A New Pneumatology: Comparing Joseph Smith's Doctrine of the Spirit with His Contemporaries and the Bible," *BYU Studies*, 51.1 (Winter, 2012).
6. Malherbe, *Thessalonians*, 153–155.
7. As mentioned earlier, just because Paul is included among the "apostles" does not mean he was a member of the "Quorum of the Twelve." This definition of apostle is further complicated when we read a modern revelation to Oliver Cowdery and David Whitmer from Joseph Smith in 1829, "I speak unto you, even as unto Paul mine apostle, for you are called even with that same calling with which he was called" (D&C 18:9) These two men were asked to seek out the Twelve Apostles, but they were not called to the original quorum in 1835 (D&C 107).
8. The *Annals* of Tacitus 15.44 recorded how Nero blamed Christians for the fire he started in Rome in AD 64: "Nero fastened the guilt and inflicted the most exquisite tortures on a class hated for their abominations, called Christians by the populace. Christus, from whom the name had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilatus, and a most mischievous superstition, thus checked for the moment, again broke out not only in Judæa, the first source of the evil, but even in Rome, where all things hideous and shameful

from every part of the world find their centre and become popular.” Earle E. Cairns, *Christianity Through the Centuries: A History of the Christian Church*, 3 ed. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1996), Chapter 7, “Christ or Caesar.” Most persecution was local until the third century. In the Roman government, “religion could be tolerated only as long as it contributed to the stability of the state . . . [There was] no rival for the allegiance of its subjects. The state was the highest good in a union of state and religion.”

9. Bruce C. Hafen, *The Broken Heart*, 50; also *Liahona*, “Beauty for Ashes,” April 1997.
10. Neal A Maxwell, *All these things shall give thee experience*, (SLC: Deseret Book, 2007) 30.
11. President Russell M. Nelson, “We Can Do Better and Be Better,” General Conference April 2019.
12. Elder Larry R. Lawrence, “What Lack I Yet?” General Conference October 2015.
13. Bercot, *Early Christian Beliefs*, 606.
14. Bruce R McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine*, (SLC: Deseret Book, 1958), 675. “Sanctification is to become clean, pure, and spotless; to be free from the blood and sins of the world to become a new creature of Holy Ghost, one whose body has been renewed by the rebirth of the Spirit.”
15. RSV, *Navarre Bible: The Revelation to John* (NYC, NY: Four Court Press, 2005), 42.
16. Ken Campbell, ed., *Marriage and Family in the Biblical World* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 2003), 143. Christian Laes claims that less than fifty percent of those lived fifteen years. *Children in the Roman Empire: Outsiders Within* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011).
17. Mishnah, *Ketuboth*, 4.4.
18. Russel M. Nelson, “We can do better and be better,” General Conference April 2019.
19. Ezra Taft Benson, “To the Boys and to the Men,” *Liahona* January 1999, 66; *Ensign*, November 1998, 54.
20. Ezra Taft Benson, “Prepare Ye,” *Ensign* January 1974, 69; “Getting a year’s supply is as important as the council to get on Noah’s ark.” Or did you hear Pres. Hinkley first tell the priesthood session to “pay off your mortgages as soon as you can.” Then two or three years later he repeated it to the general congregation at conference. A couple of years later in 2009 the economy crashed followed by September 11, 2011. Was that prophecy? How about FHE and Sabbath observance?
21. To emphasize the message of ministering or serving, I especially love the WEB translation of Mark 10:45, “The Son of Man also did not come to be waited upon, but to wait on others.”
22. Anderson, *Understanding Paul*, 84.
23. The Epistle known as Ephesians teaches that Christ becomes our temple cornerstone, apostles as the foundations, and members fitting in to their places as a holy temple of the Lord (Ephesians 2:21).
24. Russell M. Nelson, “Revelation for the Church, Revelation for our Lives,” *Ensign* May 2018.
25. Ehat and Cook, *Words of Joseph Smith*, 11–12; 62, 65, 72; 113–114; 366–368.
26. Ehat and Cook, *Words of Joseph*, 21. “We may look for angels and receive their ministrations, but we are to try the Spirits and prove them, for it is often the case that men make a mistake in regard to these things. . . . Every Spirit, or vision, or singing, is not of God. The devil is an orator; he is powerful; he took our Savior on to a pinnacle of the Temple, and kept Him in the wilderness for forty days. The gift of discerning Spirits will be given to the Presiding Elder. Pray for him that he may have this gift. Speak not in the gift of tongues without understanding it, or without interpretation” (Smith,

History 3.391–392).

27. Ehat and Cook, *Words of Joseph*, 21. George A. Smith, one of Joseph’s closest companions and cousins observed, “There was no point upon which the Prophet Joseph dwelt more than the discerning of Spirits.” “We may look for angels and receive their ministrations, but we are to try the Spirits and prove them, for it is often the case that men make a mistake in regard to these things. . . . Every Spirit, or vision, or singing, is not of God. The devil is an orator; he is powerful; he took our Savior on to a pinnacle of the Temple, and kept Him in the wilderness for forty days. The gift of discerning Spirits will be given to the Presiding Elder. Pray for him that he may have this gift. Speak not in the gift of tongues without understanding it, or without interpretation” (Smith, *History*, 3.391–392).
28. *Ibid.*, 4.573. Joseph Smith continued, “As we have noticed before, the great difficulty lies in the ignorance of the nature of spirits, of the laws by which they are governed, and the signs by which they may be known; if it requires the Spirit of God to know the things of God; and the spirit of the devil can only be unmasked through that medium, then it follows as a natural consequence that unless some person or persons have a communication, or revelation from God, unfolding to them the operation of the spirit, they must eternally remain ignorant of these principles; for I contend that if one man cannot understand these things but by the Spirit of God, ten thousand men cannot; it is alike out of the reach of the wisdom of the learned, the tongue of the eloquent, the power of the mighty. And we shall at last have to come to this conclusion, whatever we may think of revelation, that without it we can neither know nor understand anything of God, or the devil; and however unwilling the world may be to acknowledge this principle, it is evident from the multifarious creeds and notions concerning this matter that they understand nothing of this principle, and it is equally as plain that without a divine communication they must remain in ignorance” (4.573–574).
29. Brigham Young, and John A. Widstoe eds., *Discourses of Brigham Young*, (SLC, UT: Deseret Book, 1954), 117.
30. John Calvin (1509–1564) reformed Christianity by emphasizing five beliefs known as T.U. L. I. P. or Calvinism: 1) Total Depravity from the original sin; 2) Unconditional Election; 3) Limited Atonement 4) Irresistible Grace; 5) Perseverance of the Saints. Joseph Smith denounced all five of these foundational points of Reformed Christianity.
31. The KJV translation speaks of their belief that the elect were saved or damned without any mortal effort. By honoring God with complete control, agency was removed from their perspective. See on their part and the damned cannot change God’s mind. The *Westminster Confession* writings on election, which taught that God chooses to save only certain mortals: “As God hath appointed the elect unto glory, so hath he, by the eternal and most free purpose of his will, fore-ordained all the means thereunto.” *Westminster Confession* 3.6. Again in 12.1 and 3: “All those whom God hath predestinated unto life, and those only, he is pleased, in his appointed and accepted time, effectually to call, by his Word and Spirit, out of that state of sin and death . . . this effectual call is of God’s free and special grace alone, not from anything at all foreseen in man, who is altogether passive therein, until being quickened and renewed by the Holy Spirit.”
32. “Brigham Young, “This is Our Duty,” *Journal of Discourses*, 9:3.
33. Beverly R. Gaventa and David Petersen, *New Interpreters Bible* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2010), 760.
34. Institute Manual