

THE SECOND LETTER TO THE THESSALONIANS

● 1. *Who wrote the Second Letter to the Thessalonians?*

1.1. Whom does 2 Thess 1:1 identify as the authors of 2 Thessalonians?

1.2. As in 1 Thessalonians, the use of the first person plural (verb forms and pronouns) occurs frequently in 2 Thessalonians, signifying that it is a joint composition of Paul, Silvanus (Silas) and Timothy (2 Thess 1:3, 4, 11, 2:1, 13, 15; 3:1, 2, 4, 6, 10, 11, 12). Nevertheless, the first person singular occurs in 2 Thess 2:5: “Do you not remember that I told you this when I was with you?” This indicates that Paul, the first named of the three authors, is the principal author. This is confirmed by the fact that, in the conclusion of the letter, Paul writes, “The greeting is in my own hand, Paul. This is a sign of authenticity of all my letters; this is how I write” (3:17). It was Paul’s practice to write his own greeting, which naturally assumes that an amanuensis wrote everything else up to that point (see also 1 Cor 16:21; Gal 6:11; Col 4:18). The difference in handwriting would be obvious to the readers. (Paul may have sought to authenticate his letter in this way because of spurious letters circulating in his name [2:2].) The implication of 2 Thess 3:17 is that Paul was the principal author of the letter, which means that Silvanus (Silas) and Timothy had ancillary roles in its composition. Who the amanuensis of the letter was is not specified, but it is possible that it was Silvanus (Silas) or Timothy. (At a later time, Silvanus [Silas] was the amanuensis of Peter [1 Pet 5:12].)

1.3. Some have questioned the Pauline authorship of 2 Thessalonians on several grounds. The more significant reasons for questioning the authenticity of the letter are as follows.

1.3.1. The eschatology of 2 Thessalonians (2 Thess 2:1-12) is alleged to be so different from that of 1 Thessalonians (4:13-5:11) that both letters could not have been written by the same person. In 2 Thess 2:3 before the parousia of Christ there must appear the man of lawlessness, whereas in 1 Thess 4:16-17; 5:1-3 the Lord will appear suddenly, “like a thief in the night,” with no intervening events. The eschatology of 1 Thessalonians is said to resemble that found in 1 Corinthians (15), an authentic letter, and so 2 Thessalonians is judged to be inauthentic. Do you find this rea-

son questioning the authenticity of 2 Thessalonians convincing? How would you explain the apparently dissimilar eschatologies on the assumption of Pauline authorship?

1.3.2. 2 Thessalonians is so similar in structure to the 1 Thessalonians and has so many verbal parallels that some argue that 2 Thessalonians was written by an imitator, using 1 Thessalonians as a model.

A. Structurally, the main bodies of the two letters are similar; much of the content of 2 Thessalonians is paralleled in 1 Thessalonians. (Unparalleled material is found in 2 Thes 1:5-12; 2:15; 3:1-4, 13-14, 17.)

1. 2 Thess 2:13 (14) = 1 Thess 2:13. In both letters, a second thanksgiving occurs in the main body.

2. 2 Thess 2:1-12 = 1 Thess 4:13-5:11. The topic of the parousia of the Lord (Jesus Christ) is dealt with at length in both letters.

3. 2 Thess 2:16-17; 3:5; 3:16 = 1 Thess 5:23. Three times in 2 Thessalonians and once in 1 Thessalonians, a prayer is offered introduced by “The Lord (or God) (himself)” and in which the optative mood of the verb is used.

4. 2 Thess 3:6-15 = 1 Thess 5:12-15. The problem of idleness is addressed in each letter.

B. There are many verbal parallels between 1 & 2 Thessalonians.

1. The salutation of 1 Thessalonians and 2 Thessalonians are more similar to each than either is to any of Paul's other salutations (1 Thes 1:1: "Paul, Silvanus and Timothy, to the church of the Thessalonians in God the father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace to you and peace / 2 Thess 1:1-2: "Paul, Silvanus and Timothy, to the church of the Thessalonians in God the father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Grace to you and peace from God the father and the Lord Jesus Christ").

2. There are several phrases common to both letters: (1) "work of faith" (1 Thess 1:3; 2 Thess 1:11); (2) "faith...love...endurance" (1 Thess 1:3; 2 Thess 1:3-4); (3) "who do not know God" (1 Thess 4:5; 2 Thess 1:8); (4) "finally" (to loipon) (1 Thess 4:1; 2 Thess 3:1); (5) "brothers loved by..." (1 Thess 1:4; 2 Thess 2:13); (6) "hard work and toil, worked, day and night, in order not to be a burden to any of you" (1 Thess 2:9; 2 Thess 3:8); (7) "love / abound" (1 Thess 3:12; 2 Thess 1:3); (8) "pray for us" (1 Thess 5:25; 2 Thess 3:1); (9) "the parousia of our Lord Jesus (Christ)" (1 Thess 3:13; 2 Thess 2:1); (10) "we appeal in the Lord Jesus (Christ)" (1 Thess 4:1; Thess 3:12); (11) "establish you" (1 Thess 3:2; 2 Thess 3:3); (12) "receive from us" (1 Thess 2:13; 4:1; 2 Thess 3:6).

3. There are also many examples of single words appearing in both 1 Thessalonians and 2 Thessalonians; obviously, the less common of these words are the more significant for the purpose of establishing a literary or some other relationship between them. Two of the common words ("to make straight" [kateuthunô]; "idle / idly" [ataktos / ataktôs]) occur only in these two letters in the Pauline corpus.

Word	1 Thessalonians	2 Thessalonians
"endurance" (<u>hupomonê</u>)	1:3	1:4; 3:5
"affliction" (<u>thlipsis</u>)	1:6; 3:3, 7	1:4, 6
"to give in return" (<u>antapodidômi</u>)	3:9	1:6
"to afflict" (<u>thlibô</u>)	3:4	1:6, 7
"destruction" (<u>olerthos</u>)	5:3	1:9
"face or presence" (<u>prosôpon</u>)	2:17; 3:10	1:9
"glory" (<u>doxa</u>)	2:6, 12, 20	1:9; 2:14
"power" (<u>dunamis</u>)	1:5	1:7, 11; 2:9
"to pray" (<u>proseuchomai</u>)	5:17	1:11
"presence" (<u>parousia</u>)	2:19; 3:13; 4:15; 5:23	2:1, 8, 9
"to remember" (<u>mnêmoneuô</u>)	1:3; 2:9	2:5
"Satan" (<u>satanas</u>)	2:18	2:9
"to give thanks" (<u>eucharisteô</u>)	1:2; 2:13; 5:18	1:3; 2:13
"holy" (<u>hagiasmos</u>)	4:3, 4, 7	2:13
"salvation" (<u>sôtêria</u>)	5:8, 9	2:13
"to love" (<u>agapaô</u>)	4:9	2:16
"to call" (<u>kaleô</u>)	2:12; 4:7; 5:24	2:14
"possession" (<u>peripoiêsis</u>)	5:9	2:14
"appeal or encouragement" (<u>paraklêsis</u>)	2:3	2:16
"to call or appeal" (<u>parakaleô</u>)	2:12; 3:2, 7; 4:10, 18	2:17
"heart" (<u>kardia</u>)	2:4, 17; 3:13	2:17; 3:5
"to establish or strengthen" (<u>stêrizô</u>)	3:13	2:17
"to rescue" (<u>ruô</u>)	1:10	3:2
"evil" (<u>ponêros</u>)	5:22	3:2, 3
"to command" (<u>paraggellô</u>)	4:11	3:4, 6, 10, 12
"to make straight" (<u>kateuthunô</u>)	3:11	3:5

1.3.4. The greeting supposedly written by the hand of Paul in 2 Thess 3:17 is interpreted by some as a transparent attempt by the real author to pass himself as Paul. On this hypothesis, the real Paul would not have had recourse to such an obvious means of epistolary authentication. (If true, then “pseudo-Paul” is also responsible for the spurious self-reference in 2 Thess 2:2.) Do you find the argument that the real author forged a greeting from Paul in order to give the semblance of authenticity to his composition?

1.3.5. It should also be noted that if the author of 2 Thessalonians is not Paul, then in 2 Thess 2:1-2 the spurious author audaciously condemns others for creating letters falsely alleged to have come from Paul and his associates: “I ask you...not to be alarmed...at some letter supposedly from us.” To write this would be so hypocritical as to be unbelievable.

● 2. To whom was the Second Letter to the Thessalonians written?

2.1. Whom does 2 Thess 1:1 identify as the intended readers of 2 Thessalonians?

2.2. While in Thessalonica, Paul, Silvanus and Timothy transmitted a body of oral teaching to the Thessalonians, to which they later appeal in their two letters (1 Thess 3:4; 4:2; 2 Thess 2:5, 15; 3:10). This oral teaching included the necessity of suffering persecution (1 Thess 3:4), information about eschatological matters (2 Thess 2:5) and the necessity of work: “If anyone is not willing to work, he shall not eat” (2 Thess 3:10).

● 3. When was the Second Letter to the Thessalonians written?

2 Thessalonians is usually dated to shortly after the composition of 1 Thessalonians, c. 51-52. Attempts have been made to establish the reverse, that 2 Thessalonians was written first, but the evidence for such a position is weak. The data supporting the traditional relative dating is as follows.

3.1. Paul makes reference to at least one previous letter in 2 Thess 2:15, which is probably a reference to 1 Thessalonians. By contrast, Paul says nothing in 1 Thessalonians of having written a previous letter.

3.2. In 1 Thess 2:2-10 Paul, Silvanus and Timothy give thanks to God for the conversion of the Thessalonians, how they “turned to God from idols to worship the living and true God.” Likewise, in the second thanksgiving it is said: “We thank God continually because when you received the word of God, heard from us, you received it not as the word of man but, as it really is, the word of God” (2:13). On the other hand, in 2 Thess 1:3-4, the authors give thanks for the *continued* growth of the Thessalonian believers: “We ought always to give thanks for you...because your faith is increasing and the love that you have for another abounds.” What does this suggest about the order in which the two letters were written?

3.3. 1 Thessalonians was written upon Timothy's return to Paul in Corinth (1 Thess 3:6). Prior to Timothy's being sent from Athens to Thessalonica and his return to Paul, the authors knew nothing of the spiritual condition of their Thessalonian converts, and so were greatly anxious for them (1 Thess 2:17-3:10). If 2 Thessalonians was written before 1 Thessalonians, it is strange that there is no hint of this anxiety for the Thessalonians in that letter, nor any statement of a desire to return to the city to check on their condition (see 1 Thess 2:17-3:1). The impression with which the reader is left is that 2 Thessalonians was written after 1 Thessalonians. Besides, 2 Thessalonians presupposes knowledge of the Thessalonians' spiritual condition that the authors did not have until after Timothy's return from his return visit to the city at the earliest (see 3:11).

● 4. *Where was the Second Letter to the Thessalonians written?*

Assuming that 2 Thessalonians was written shortly after 1 Thessalonians, from what you know of Pauline chronology, where do you think that Paul wrote 2 Thessalonians?

● 5. *What is the Second Letter to the Thessalonians?*

Outline of the Second Letter to the Thessalonians

A. 1:1-12: This represents the introduction of the letter.

1. 1:1-2: This is the salutation of the letter.

2. 1:3-12: In 1:3-4, Paul gives thanks to God for the Thessalonians. Deviating from standard epistolary form, in 1:5-10 Paul speaks about the judgment of God at the revealing of the Lord Jesus, when God will repay those who are persecuting the Thessalonians. He then offers a prayer for the Thessalonians in 1:11-12.

B. 2:1-3:15: This represents the main body of the letter.

1. 2:1-12: Paul explains in more detail about the parousia of Christ, because there is a rumor that the day of the Lord has already come. He says that the end cannot come until the appearance of "the man of lawlessness," in accordance with the work of Satan. The "man of lawlessness" will exalt himself over all that is identified as divine or worshipped, set himself up in the Temple of God and even claim to be God. The secret of lawlessness is already at work, but the one who restrains it will continue to do so until it is removed. Then the lawless one will be revealed, whom Christ will destroy at his parousia.

2. 2:13-17: In another departure from standard epistolary form, Paul offers another thanksgiving for and prayer on behalf of the Thessalonians.

3. 3:1-15: Paul asks for prayer that the gospel will continue to spread and that Paul and his associates would be protected from evil men. He also exhorts the Thessalonians not to be idle nor associate with the idle, laying down the rule that if a man does not work, he ought not to eat.

C. 3:16-18: This represents the conclusion of the letter, including benedictions and greetings.

6. Why was the Second Letter to the Thessalonians written?

Assuming that he wrote what he did for a purpose, what can you determine about Paul’s reasons for writing the Second Letter to the Thessalonians from the contents of following passages?

6.1. 2 Thess 1:3-12

6.2. 2 Thess 3:6-15

6.3. 2 Thess 2:2

6.4. 2 Thess 3:1-2
