

2 THESSALONIANS

Not Yet

AUTHOR	Paul, with Silvanus and Timothy, 1:1. Paul signs it in his own hand, 3:17. Many scholars think a follower wrote it later, because it sounds different about the end than 1 Thessalonians.
WRITTEN FROM	Corinth, where Paul, Silas and Timothy were together, Acts 18:5.
DATE WRITTEN	About AD 51, a few months after 1 Thessalonians.
WRITTEN TO	The same young church in Thessalonica, still under persecution, 1:4.
WHY HE WROTE	A fake message said the Day of the Lord had already come, 2:2. Some believers had quit working, 3:11. Paul wrote to calm them down and set them straight.
KEY VERSE	2 Thessalonians 2:3. Let no one deceive you in any way, for it will not come until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed.



AN EARLY COPY OF 2 THESSALONIANS

A page of Codex Vaticanus, one of the oldest complete Bibles, copied about AD 300 to 350, in the Vatican Library. The left column ends 2 Thessalonians, 3:11 to 18, with Paul's signature line, 3:17. The next columns start Hebrews. Older still is Papyrus 30, from the 200s, which holds a few verses of 2 Thessalonians.

Historical Setting

Paul had written 1 Thessalonians to comfort a church that was afraid their dead would miss the return of Jesus. Then things got worse. The persecution kept going. And someone, maybe a prophet in the church, maybe a fake letter signed with Paul's name, told them the

Day of the Lord was already here. Some were so shaken that they quit their jobs. Paul writes back fast, from Corinth, to say: calm down, not yet, and get back to work. For the first letter, see 1 Thessalonians, p.---

What Thessalonica Was Up Against

- PERSECUTION.** They were still suffering for their faith, 1:4 to 6.
- PANIC.** They were told the Day of the Lord had already come, 2:2.
- A FAKE LETTER.** Someone may have used Paul's name to spread it, 2:2 and 3:17.
- IDLE BELIEVERS.** Some were not working, just being busybodies, 3:11.

The Idiot Proof Summary

2 Thessalonians is Paul's follow up letter. The church had heard that the end had already come, and some had panicked. Paul says no. Certain things have to happen first, and Jesus will win when He comes. Until then, do not freak out, do not quit your job, and do not stop doing good. It is a short letter for anyone who has been scared by end times headlines.

2 Thessalonians at a Glance

- CH 1 JUSTICE IS COMING**
God will repay those who hurt you and give you relief when Jesus is revealed.
- CH 2 NOT YET**
The rebellion and the man of lawlessness come first. Stand firm.
- CH 3 GET TO WORK**
Pray, keep away from the idle, and do not grow weary in doing good.

Where Jesus Shows Up

- 2 THESSALONIANS 1:7 TO 10** The Lord Jesus revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in blazing fire. Still to come.
- 2 THESSALONIANS 2:8** The Lord Jesus will slay the lawless one with the breath of His mouth. Echoes Isaiah 11:4. Still to come.

What to Watch for in 2 Thessalonians

- END TIMES PROPHECIES** 1:7-10, 2:3-12
- THE HEART** 3:5
- NOTABLE** 3:3, 3:10, 3:13, 3:16
- JESUS SPEAKING** Words in red are Jesus speaking, or God the Father speaking from heaven.

Cool Stuff Most People Miss

- PAUL'S SIGNATURE**
Paul usually dictated his letters to a helper, then signed the end himself, 3:17. Romans even names the writer, Tertius, Romans 16:22.
- ANTICHRIST?**
The word antichrist is never used in this letter. Paul says the man of lawlessness. The word antichrist only shows up in 1 and 2 John.

THE MOST ARGUED OVER VERSES

Who the restrainer is in 2:6 to 7 may be the most debated question in all of Paul's letters. See The Big Question pages, p.--.

THE WORK RULE

3:10 became a common saying. Captain John Smith used it in Jamestown, Virginia, in 1608 to make lazy colonists work.

Did Anybody Listen?

It seems so. When Paul passed through Macedonia again a few years later, the churches there were so generous that they begged to give to the poor in Jerusalem, even in deep poverty, 2 Corinthians 8:1 to 4. Thessalonica stayed a strong Christian city for centuries, and its church of Saint Demetrius, first built in the 400s, is one of the largest in Greece.

END TIMES PROPHECIES

1

CHAPTER 1 IN 30 SECONDS

The church is still getting hammered, and Paul is still bragging on them. Hang on. When Jesus is revealed from heaven with blazing fire, He will make things right. The people hurting you will pay, and you will get relief.

GREETINGS TO THE THESSALONIANS // 1 THESSALONIANS 1:1-10

¹Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy,

To the church of the Thessalonians in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ:

²Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

³We are obligated to thank God for you all the time, brothers, as is fitting, because your faith is growing more and more, and your love for one another is increasing. ⁴

That is why we boast among God's churches about your perseverance and faith in the face of all the persecution and affliction you are enduring.

CHRIST'S COMING

⁵All this is clear evidence of God's righteous judgment. And so you will be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are suffering. ⁶After all, it is only right for God to repay with affliction those who afflict you, ⁷and to grant relief to you who are oppressed and to us as well. This will take place when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels ⁸in blazing fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. ⁹They will suffer the penalty of eternal destruction, separated from the presence of the Lord and the glory of His might, ¹⁰on the day He comes to be glorified in His saints and regarded with won-

der by all who have believed, including you who have believed our testimony.

¹¹To this end, we always pray for you, that our God will count you worthy of His calling, and that He will powerfully fulfill your every good desire and work of faith, ¹²so that the name of our Lord Jesus will be glorified in you, and you in Him, according to the grace of our God and of the Lord Jesus Christ.

2

CHAPTER 2 IN 30 SECONDS

Somebody sent a fake letter saying the Day of the Lord already came. Paul says not yet. First the rebellion has to happen and the man of lawlessness has to show up, and something is holding him back. When he comes, Jesus will wipe him out with a breath. So stand firm.

THE MAN OF LAWLESSNESS

¹Now concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered together to Him, we ask you, brothers, ²not to be easily disconcerted or alarmed by any spirit or message or letter seeming to be from us, alleging that the Day of the Lord has already come. ³Let no one deceive you in any way, for it will not come until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness—the son of destruction—is revealed. ⁴He will oppose and exalt himself above every so-called god or object of worship. So he will seat himself in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God.

■ 2TH 1:7 [PROPHECY] The Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel → STILL TO COME

■ 2TH 1:8 [ALLUDES TO] Refers to ← JS 66:15 p.~

■ 2TH 1:9 [NOTE] ETERNAL DESTRUCTION. Most churches through history read this as eternal punishment, a conscious separation from God that never ends, Matthew 25:46. Some, like the British pastor John Stott, leaned toward annihilation: the lost are destroyed for good and cease to exist. A few hold that in the end all will be saved, a view tied to Origen. Whatever view, Paul's point is that God will make things right, 1:6 to 7.

■ 2TH 2:2 [NOTE] A FAKE LETTER. Someone was spreading a message seemingly from us, maybe a letter forged in Paul's name. That is why he signs this one himself, 3:17. Check everything, even when it uses a famous name, 1 Thessalonians 5:21.

■ 2TH 2:3 [PROPHECY] That Day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition, who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God... whom the Lord will consume with the breath of His mouth and destroy with the brightness of His coming → STILL TO COME

■ 2TH 2:3 [NOTE] WHO IS HE? See The Big Question pages on the man of lawlessness and the restrainer, and the Caligula and the Temple Field Notes page.

■ 2TH 2:4 [DEMONIC] The man of lawlessness exalts himself above every god

■ 2TH 2:4 [ALLUDES TO] Refers to ← DAN 11:36 p.~

END TIMES PROPHECIES

FIELD NOTES · ARCHAEOLOGY · CONFIDENCE: HIGH
FOR THE HISTORY · THE LINK IS A SCHOLARS' VIEW

CALIGULA AND THE TEMPLE

2 THESSALONIANS 2:3 TO 4 · MARK 13:14 · DANIEL 11:31



Left: marble portrait of the emperor Gaius, called Caligula, AD 37 to 41. Metropolitan Museum of Art, public domain.
Right: a bronze sestertius of Caligula, Rome, AD 37 to 38. Bibliothèque nationale de France, public domain.

WHAT IT IS

A marble head of the Roman emperor Gaius, nicknamed Caligula, and one of his coins with his name, C CAESAR AVG GERMANICVS.

HOW OLD IT IS

Both are from his own reign, AD 37 to 41, about ten years before Paul wrote this letter.

WHAT HE TRIED TO DO

Caligula wanted to be worshiped as a god. About AD 40 he ordered a giant statue of himself set up inside the temple in Jerusalem. The Jewish writer Philo, who met him, and the historian Josephus both tell the story. The Roman governor Petronius stalled, Jewish crowds begged him to stop, and King Agrippa pleaded with Caligula. Then Caligula was murdered in January AD 41, and the statue never went in.

WHY IT MATTERS HERE

Paul says the man of lawlessness will seat himself in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God, 2:4. The Thessalonians had just lived through a real emperor who tried to do exactly that. Many scholars think it shaped how they heard Paul's words.

HOW PEOPLE READ IT

Some see Caligula as a preview of a future Antichrist who will do it for real. Preterists see the fulfillment in the Romans and Zealots who defiled the temple before it burned in AD 70. Others

read temple of God as the church. See The Big Question pages.

WHAT IT DOES NOT PROVE

Paul never names Caligula. The coin and portrait show who Caligula was, not who Paul had in mind.

⁵ Do you not remember that I told you these things while I was still with you? ⁶ And you know what is now restraining him, so that he may be revealed at the proper time. ⁷ For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work, but the one who now restrains it will continue until he is taken out of the way. ⁸ And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will slay with the breath of His mouth and annihilate by the majesty of His arrival.

⁹ The coming of the lawless one will be accompanied by the working of Satan, with every kind of power, sign, and false wonder, ¹⁰ and with every wicked deception directed against those who are perishing, because they refused the love of the truth that would have saved them. ¹¹ For this reason God will send them a powerful delusion so that they believe the lie, ¹² in order that judgment may come upon all who have disbelieved the truth and delighted in wickedness.

■ 2TH 2:8 [PROPHECY] The Lord Jesus will destroy the lawless one by the breath of His mouth at His coming → STILL TO COME

■ 2TH 2:8 [ALLUDES TO] Refers to ← IS 11:4 p.~

■ 2TH 2:11 [PROPHECY] God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie, that they all may be condemned → STILL TO COME

DEBATED THE BIG QUESTION**THE MAN OF LAWLESSNESS***Who Is He?*

2 THESSALONIANS 2:1 TO 12 · 1 JOHN 2:18 · DANIEL 11:36

WHAT PAUL SAID

Some told the church that the Day of the Lord had already come. Paul says it will not come until two things happen. First, the rebellion. Second, the man of lawlessness, the son of destruction, is revealed. He sets himself above every god, sits in the temple of God and claims to be God, 2:3 to 4. Satan gives him power and fake miracles, 2:9. Then Jesus destroys him with the breath of His mouth, 2:8. Paul had told them more in person, 2:5, but he did not write it down, so we have to piece it together.

FUTURE ANTICHRIST

Most Christians today read him as one evil world ruler still to come at the end, the same as the beast of Revelation 13 and the king of Daniel 11:36. Many expect a rebuilt temple in Jerusalem. Early leaders like Irenaeus, about AD 180, and Hippolytus, about AD 200, read it this way, and so do most dispensational and premillennial teachers today.

ALREADY HAPPENED, AD 70

Preterists say he came in the first century. Some point to Nero; some to the Zealot leaders who took over the temple and filled it with murder during the war with Rome; some to the Roman general Titus, who stood in the temple as it burned in AD 70. They point out that Paul spoke to his readers about a temple that was standing at the time.

THE PAPACY

The Protestant Reformers taught that the man of lawlessness was the office of the pope, sitting in the temple of God, the church, and claiming God's authority. Martin Luther said so in the Smalcald Articles, 1537, and the Westminster Confession of Faith, 1646, called the pope that man of sin. Many churches later took that line out, like American Presbyterians in 1903. Catholics, of course, reject it.

A SPIRIT IN EVERY AGE

Some read the man of lawlessness as a picture of the spirit of rebellion that shows up again and again, in many tyrants and false teachers. John says many antichrists have already come, 1 John 2:18. Many who hold this still expect a final one.

THE REBELLION, 2:3

The Greek word is apostasia, falling away or rebellion, a great turning from God. A few pre tribulation teachers argue it means a departure, the rapture itself, and note that Tyndale's 1526 New Testament and the Geneva Bible of 1560 said departing. Most scholars say the word means rebellion, and most modern Bibles say so.

What Is Holding It Back?

2 THESSALONIANS 2:5 TO 8

WHAT PAUL SAID

Something is holding back the man of lawlessness until the right time, 2:6. Paul calls it a thing in 2:6 and a person in 2:7, the one who now restrains it, until he is taken out of the way. The readers knew what he meant, 2:6. We do not. Augustine admitted about AD 426 that he had no idea what Paul meant.

THE HOLY SPIRIT, OR THE CHURCH

Only God is strong enough to hold back Satan's man. The Holy Spirit lives in the church, so when the church is taken in the rapture, the restraint is gone. This is the main pre tribulation view. Others agree it is the Spirit but say He is not removed from the earth, only the way He holds back evil changes.

ROMAN LAW AND ORDER

The oldest known answer. Tertullian, about AD 200, and John Chrysostom, about AD 400, said it was the Roman Empire, a thing, and the emperor, a person. That fits Paul switching between it and he. Many today widen it to government and law in general, Romans 13:1 to 4.

THE ANGEL MICHAEL

Michael stands guard over God's people in Daniel 10:21 and 12:1, and Daniel 12:1 ties him to a time of great distress at the end. Some read that verse as Michael

THE HEART NOTABLE

standing aside, and think Paul means him.

THE PREACHING OF THE GOSPEL

The end cannot come until the gospel goes to all nations, Matthew 24:14. Some say the restrainer is that mission, or Paul himself as its leader. Others say it is God Himself, holding things back until His set time.

THE TIMING DEBATE

This passage is a key text for when the rapture happens. Post tribulation readers say 2:1 to 3 puts our being gathered to Him after the man of lawlessness shows up. Pre tribulation readers say the restrainer's removal in 2:7 is the rapture, before he is revealed. See The Big Question pages in 1 Thessalonians, p. ...

WHAT WE ALL AGREE ON

Evil will not win. God sets the timing. The lawless one is doomed the moment Jesus shows up, 2:8. And Paul's point is practical: do not be shaken, 2:2, and stand firm, 2:15.

STAND FIRM

¹³ But we should always thank God for you, brothers who are loved by the Lord, because God chose you from the beginning to be saved by the sanctification of the Spirit and by faith in the truth. ¹⁴ To this He called you through our gospel, so that you may share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. ¹⁵ Therefore, brothers, stand firm and cling to the traditions we taught you, whether by speech or by letter.

¹⁶ Now may our Lord Jesus Christ Himself and God our Father, who by grace has loved us and given us eternal comfort and good hope, ¹⁷ encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good word and deed.

■ **2TH 2:15 [NOTE] THE TRADITIONS.** The Greek word *paradosis* means what is handed down. Catholic and Orthodox Christians read this as Sacred Tradition, teaching passed on by speech beside the written Word. Most Protestants say the apostles' spoken teaching is now preserved in Scripture, and Scripture is the final judge of every tradition. Both agree: hold on to what the apostles taught.

3

CHAPTER 3 IN 30 SECONDS

Pray for us, and the Lord will guard you. Now about the people who quit their jobs and are mooching off everybody: no work, no food. Get to work quietly, and do not get tired of doing good. Paul signs off in his own handwriting so nobody can fake it.

REQUEST FOR PRAYER

¹ Finally, brothers, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may spread quickly and be held in honor, just as it was with you. ² And pray that we may be delivered from wicked and evil men; for not everyone holds to the faith. ³ But the Lord is faithful, and He will strengthen you and guard you from the evil one. ⁴ And we have confidence in the Lord that you are doing and will continue to do what we command. ⁵ May the Lord direct your hearts into God's love and Christ's perseverance.

A WARNING AGAINST IDLENESS

⁶ Now we command you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, to keep away from any brother who leads an undisciplined life that is not in keeping with the tradition you received from us. ⁷ For you yourselves know how you ought to imitate us, because we were not undisciplined among you, ⁸ nor did we eat anyone's food without paying for it. Instead, in labor and toil, we worked night and day so that we would not be a burden to any of you. ⁹ Not that we lack this right, but we wanted to offer ourselves as an example for you to imitate. ¹⁰ For even while we were with you, we gave you this command: "If anyone is unwilling to work, he shall not eat."

■ **2TH 3:3 [NOTABLE]** Paul just asked them to pray for him because not everyone has faith, 3:2. Then he turns it around: people are not always faithful, but the Lord is. Your safety does not rest on how strong you are. It rests on Him.

■ **2TH 3:5 [HEART]** May the Lord direct your hearts into God's love.

■ **2TH 3:6 [NOTE] THE IDLE.** Some had quit working, maybe because they thought Jesus was coming any day, maybe because rich believers would feed them. Paul worked night and day to set an example, 3:8 to 9, the tentmaker way, Acts 18:3. Faith in the return of Jesus is never a reason to stop working.

■ **2TH 3:10 [NOTABLE]** This is about the unwilling, not the unable. The church cared for widows and the sick, 1 Timothy 5:3. But a believer who could work and chose not to

NOTABLE

¹¹ For we hear that some of you are leading undisciplined lives, accomplishing nothing, but being busybodies. ¹² We command and urge such people by our Lord Jesus Christ to begin working quietly to earn their own living. ¹³ But as for you, brothers, do not grow weary in well-doing.

¹⁴ Take note of anyone who does not obey the instructions we have given in this letter. Do not associate with him, so that he may be ashamed. ¹⁵ Yet do not regard him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother.

SIGNATURE AND FINAL GREETINGS // 1 CORINTHIANS 16:19–24; COLOSSIANS 4:15–18

¹⁶ Now may the Lord of peace Himself give you peace at all times and in every way. The Lord be with all of you.

¹⁷ This greeting is in my own hand—Paul. This is my mark in every letter; it is the way I write.

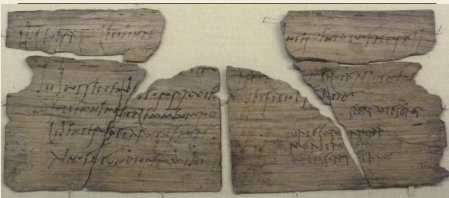
¹⁸ The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with all of you.

FIELD NOTES • ARCHAEOLOGY • CONFIDENCE: HIGH

IN MY OWN HAND

2 THESSALONIANS 3:17 • GALATIANS 6:11 • ROMANS

16:22



Vindolanda tablet 291, a birthday invitation from Claudia Severa to Sulpicia Lepidina, about AD 100. British Museum. Photo Fæ, CC BY SA 3.0.

WHAT IT IS

A thin wooden writing tablet with a birthday party invitation, found at Vindolanda, a Roman fort near Hadrian's Wall in northern England. A lady named Claudia Severa invites her friend Sulpicia Lepidina to her birthday on September 11.

HOW OLD IT IS

About AD 100, some 50 years after Paul wrote. It was dug up in the 1970s and is now in the British Museum.

TWO HANDWRITINGS

Most of the letter is written neatly by a scribe. The last four lines, on the right half, are in a different and shakier hand. Experts think Claudia wrote them herself: she will expect her, her sister, and she says goodbye, my dearest soul. It may be the oldest Latin writing by a woman that we have.

JUST LIKE PAUL

Paul did the same thing. A helper wrote out the letter as Paul spoke. Tertius even says hi in Romans 16:22. Then Paul took the pen and wrote the last lines himself: This greeting is in my own hand, 3:17. See what large letters I am using, Galatians 6:11.

WHY IT MATTERS

A fake letter in Paul's name had already caused trouble, 2:2. Paul's own handwriting at the end was his mark in every letter, so the church could tell the real thing from a forgery.

WHAT IT DOES NOT PROVE

This tablet has nothing to do with Paul. It shows how letters worked in his world.

was not to live off everyone else. Paul set the example by working night and day, 3:8.

■ **2TH 3:13 [NOTABLE]** Doing good gets old when people take advantage of you, like the idle ones in 3:11. Paul says keep going anyway. Galatians 6:9 says the same: in due time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.

■ **2TH 3:14 [NOTE] CHURCH DISCIPLINE.** Do not associate with him, so he will feel ashamed and turn around. But do not treat him as an enemy. Warn him as a brother, 3:15. The goal is always to win the person back, Matthew 18:15 and Galatians 6:1.

■ **2TH 3:16 [NOTABLE]** Peace does not come from your situation. It comes from a Person. Paul prays it over a church facing persecution, confusion about the end and lazy members. At all times and in every way means there is no situation too messy for His peace.

■ **2TH 3:17 [FIELD NOTES]** See the In My Own Hand Field Notes page.