

LifeChange

A NAVPRESS BIBLE STUDY SERIES

*A life-changing
encounter with God's Word*

2 THESSALONIANS

*When fear, anxiety, or doubt
threatens to set your faith adrift.*

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NAVPRESS 

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2 Thessalonians

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HOW TO USE THIS STUDY

Objectives

Most guides in the LIFECHANGE series of Bible studies cover one book of the Bible. Although the LIFECHANGE guides vary with the books they explore, they share some common goals:

1. To provide you with a firm foundation of understanding and a thirst to return to the book.
2. To teach you by example how to study a book of the Bible without structured guides.
3. To give you all the historical background, word definitions, and explanatory notes you need, so that your only other reference is the Bible.
4. To help you grasp the message of the book as a whole.
5. To teach you how to let God's Word transform you into Christ's image.

Each lesson in this study is designed to take sixty to ninety minutes to complete on your own. The guide is based on the assumption that you are completing one lesson per week, but if time is limited you can do half a lesson per week or whatever amount allows you to be thorough.

Flexibility

LIFECHANGE guides are flexible, allowing you to adjust the quantity and depth of your study to meet your individual needs. The guide offers many optional questions in addition to the regular numbered questions. The optional questions, which appear in the margins of the study pages, include the following:

Optional Application. Nearly all application questions are optional; we hope you will do as many as you can without overcommitting yourself.

For Thought and Discussion. Beginning Bible students should be able to handle these, but even advanced students need to think about them. These questions frequently deal with ethical issues and other biblical principles. They often offer cross-references to spark thought, but the references do not give obvious answers. They are good for group discussions.

For Further Study. These include: (a) cross-references that shed light on a topic the book discusses, and (b) questions that delve deeper into the passage. You can omit them to shorten a lesson without missing a major point of the passage.

If you are meeting in a group, decide together which optional questions to prepare for each lesson, and how much of the lesson you will cover at the next meeting. Normally, the group leader should make this decision, but you might let each member choose his or her own application questions.

As you grow in your walk with God, you will find the LIFECHANGE guide growing with you—a helpful reference on a topic, a continuing challenge for application, a source of questions for many levels of growth.

Overview and details

The study begins with an overview of 2 Thessalonians. The key to interpretation is context—what is the whole passage or book *about*?—and the key to context is purpose—what is the author’s *aim* for the whole work? In lesson 1, you will lay the foundation for your study of 2 Thessalonians by asking yourself, *Why did the author (and God) write the book? What did they want to accomplish? What is the book about?*

Then over the next six lessons, you will analyze successive passages in detail. You’ll interpret particular verses in light of what the whole paragraph is about. You’ll consider how each passage contributes to the total message of the book. (Frequently reviewing a chart or outline of the book will enable you to make these connections.) Then, once you understand what the passage says, you’ll apply it to your own life.

In lesson 7, you will review the whole epistle, returning to the big picture to see whether your view of it has changed after closer study. Review will also strengthen your grasp of major issues and give you an idea of how you have grown from your study.

Kinds of questions

Bible study on your own—without a structured guide—follows a progression. First you observe: What does the passage *say*? Then you interpret: What does the passage *mean*? Lastly you apply: How does this truth *affect* my life?

Some of the “how” and “why” questions will take some creative thinking, even prayer, to answer. Some are opinion questions without clear-cut right answers; these will lend themselves to discussions and side studies.

Don’t let your study become an exercise in knowledge alone. Treat the passage as God’s Word, and stay in dialogue with Him as you study. Pray,

“Lord, what do You want me to see here?” “Father, why is this true?” “Lord, how does this apply to my life?”

It is important that you write down your answers. The act of writing clarifies your thinking and helps you to remember what you have learned.

Study aids

A list of reference materials, including a few notes of explanation to help you make good use of them, begins on page 83. This guide is designed to include enough background to let you interpret with just your Bible and the guide. Still, if you want more information on a subject or want to study a book on your own, try the references listed.

Scripture versions

Unless otherwise indicated, the Bible quotations in this guide are from the New International Version of the Bible. Other versions cited are the Revised Standard Version (RSV) and the King James Version (KJV).

Use any translation you like for study, preferably more than one. A paraphrase such as The Living Bible is not accurate enough for study, but it can be helpful for comparison or devotional reading.

Memorizing and meditating

A psalmist wrote, “I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you” (Psalm 119:11). If you write down a verse or passage that challenges or encourages you and reflect on it often for a week or more, you will find it beginning to affect your motives and actions. We forget quickly what we read once; we remember what we ponder.

When you find a significant verse or passage, you might copy it onto a card to keep with you. Set aside five minutes during each day just to think about what the passage might mean in your life. Recite it over to yourself, exploring its meaning. Then, return to your passage as often as you can during your day, for a brief review. You will soon find it coming to mind spontaneously.

For group study

A group of four to ten people allows the richest discussions, but you can adapt this guide for other sized groups. It will suit a wide range of group types, such as home Bible studies, growth groups, youth groups, and businessmen’s studies. Both new and experienced Bible students, and new and

mature Christians, will benefit from the guide. You can omit or leave for later years any questions you find too easy or too hard.

The guide is intended to lead a group through one lesson per week. However, feel free to split lessons if you want to discuss them more thoroughly. Or, omit some questions in a lesson if preparation or discussion time is limited. You can always return to this guide for personal study later. You will be able to discuss only a few questions at length, so choose some for discussion and others for background. Make time at each discussion for members to ask about anything they didn't understand.

Each lesson in the guide ends with a section called "For the group." These sections give advice on how to focus a discussion, how you might apply the lesson in your group, how you might shorten a lesson, and so on. The group leader should read each "For the group" at least a week ahead so that he or she can tell the group how to prepare for the next lesson.

Each member should prepare for a meeting by writing answers for all of the background and discussion questions to be covered. If the group decides not to take an hour per week for private preparation, then expect to take at least two meetings per lesson to work through the questions. Application will be very difficult, however, without private thought and prayer.

Two reasons for studying in a group are accountability and support. When each member commits in front of the rest to seek growth in an area of life, you can pray with one another, listen jointly for God's guidance, help one another to resist temptation, assure each other that the other's growth matters to you, use the group to practice spiritual principles, and so on. Pray about one another's commitments and needs at most meetings. Spend the first few minutes of each meeting sharing any results from applications prompted by previous lessons. Then discuss new applications toward the end of the meeting. Follow such sharing with prayer for these and other needs.

If you write down each other's applications and prayer requests, you are more likely to remember to pray for them during the week, ask about them at the next meeting, and notice answered prayers. You might want to get a notebook for prayer requests and discussion notes.

Notes taken during discussion will help you to remember, follow up on ideas, stay on the subject, and clarify a total view of an issue. But don't let note-taking keep you from participating. Some groups choose one member at each meeting to take notes. Then someone copies the notes and distributes them at the next meeting. Rotating these tasks can help include people. Some groups have someone take notes on a large pad of paper or erasable marker board so that everyone can see what has been recorded.

Page 86 lists some good sources of counsel for leading group studies.

INTRODUCTION

Background to 2 Thessalonians

Map of the Roman Empire



The poet Antipater called Thessalonica the “mother of all Macedon.”¹ Strabo, the Greek geographer of the Augustan Age, described it as Macedonia’s most populous town and the metropolis of the entire province.² Indeed, with a population of over 200,000, Thessalonica was widely considered a city to be reckoned with . . . economically, politically, and militarily.

When the apostle Paul traveled throughout Macedonia on his second missionary tour, he encountered a land of high mountains, broad rivers, and fertile valleys. This area of the world boasted rich farmland and timber, and was well known for its extensive deposits of silver and gold.

Thessalonica had flourished for hundreds of years, largely because of its ideal location on the banks of the Thermaic Gulf near the northwest corner

of the Aegean Sea. It was one of the main sea ports in the provinces of Greece and Asia, and was accordingly considered a leading shipping and naval center. Thessalonica enjoyed another advantage. The Egnatian Way, the main Roman road from Rome to the Orient via Byzantium (modern Istanbul), passed right through the city. These factors put Thessalonica in direct contact with many other important cities by both land and sea. It is no wonder that this thriving metropolis achieved commercial dominance throughout this part of the world.

A famous woman immortalized

The historical roots of Thessalonica go back to 315 BC when Cassander built it near the site of an ancient city called Therma (named for the hot springs in the area). He chose this location because of its ideal proximity to other cities. After laying the foundation of the new city, he affectionately named it after his wife, Thanica, who was a half sister of Alexander the Great. Cassander was a Greek general under Alexander.

Many years later (around 168 BC), the Romans conquered the area and divided Macedonia into four districts. They named Thessalonica the capital of the second district. Still later, when the Romans made Macedonia a province in 146 BC, Thessalonica became the seat of provincial administration. Then in 42 BC, Thessalonica received the status of a free city from Anthony and Octavian (later called Caesar Augustus) because the Thessalonians had helped them defeat their adversaries, Brutus and Cassius. From this time forward, the Thessalonians were given the privilege of ruling themselves. They did this by means of five or six “politarchs” (city rulers), a senate, and a public assembly.

Paul: a transformed missionary

Paul was a missionary for much of his life, both before and after his conversion to Christianity. He was a Jew by birth, but his education was far from what a normal Jew would have received. His learning encompassed not only the Pharisaic approach to the Jewish Law but also the Greek disciplines of rhetoric and classical literature. As a Pharisee, he believed that God had set him apart to study and live by the *Torah* (the Law of Moses), and like a good Pharisee, he expected a Man to arise who would liberate Israel from the grip of Roman domination. Accordingly, when some Jews began saying that Jesus (who obviously hadn't overthrown Rome) was this predicted Messiah, he stood against them with a vengeance!

In a sense, Saul (Paul's Jewish name) became a zealous anti-Christian missionary. His first appearance in the New Testament is that of a persecutor of the church of Jesus Christ. He officiated at the stoning of Stephen; he imprisoned every Christian he could get his hands on in Jerusalem; and he even made “missionary trips” to areas outside of Palestine to bring back believers in Christ who had fled for safety (see Acts 7:58–8:3; 9:1-2; 1 Corinthians 15:9; Philippians 3:6). His mission was to stop the spread of Christianity.

It was on such a trip to Damascus that Saul had a blinding encounter with Jesus Christ. This event, which took place around AD 35, led him to turn from Pharisaism to a devoted obedience to the living and resurrected Christ. He ended up joining those he had been persecuting! Formerly he was a missionary against the church of Christ. Now he became a missionary par excellence for the cause of Christ.

After his conversion to Christianity, Paul engaged in three great missionary tours. His second missionary tour took place around AD 49 (about fourteen years after his conversion) and brought him to several important cities, including Philippi, Thessalonica, Corinth, and Ephesus.

Paul visits Thessalonica

Upon arriving in Thessalonica, Paul began his usual activities of soul-winning and earning a livelihood. He found a friend in Jason, who was apparently one of Paul's earliest converts in the city. Jason provided his home as a base of operations for Paul and his missionary companions. Once settled, Paul probably went to work immediately making tents to earn money as he had done in other cities, for later in his letters to the Thessalonians he reminded them that he had worked "night and day in order not to be a burden to anyone while we preached the gospel of God to you" (1 Thessalonians 2:9; see 2 Thessalonians 3:8).

When the time came to preach the gospel, Paul followed his custom of first going to the local Jewish synagogue, where he knew he would find people who held a great deal in common with him: a mutual respect for the Old Testament, theological concepts, and cultural practices. In his thinking, this was where he stood the greatest chance for success. As a trained teacher, Paul was allowed to speak in the synagogue. According to Luke, his main message to the Thessalonians consisted of two points: (1) the Old Testament taught a suffering, dying, and resurrected Messiah, and (2) these predictions were fulfilled in Jesus of Nazareth.

Paul's mission met with immediate success, and many believed, both Jews and Greeks. First Thessalonians 1:9 indicates that many of his Greek converts were former idol-worshippers. Most people in the ancient world worshiped natural forces and human drives, conceived of as gods who could be portrayed in wood, stone, or metal. Sexuality was a strong feature of pagan worship, and Paul found it necessary to address this very issue in 1 Thessalonians 4:1-8. The pursuit of religious ecstasy through sex was a hard habit to break.

The core of this young church was no doubt made up of "God-fearers," a Jewish term for Greeks who attached themselves in varying degrees to the Jewish worship and way of life without as yet becoming full converts. To become a full convert involved circumcision for males, but Greeks viewed this rite as a repugnant mutilation of the body. Paul's message included all of the attractive elements of Judaism without the unattractive ones.

These God-fearers were openly dissatisfied with pagan morality and were already drawn to Jewish ethical teaching. They were also impressed by Jewish monotheism. Yet in spite of their attraction to Judaism, they disliked

its narrow nationalism and ritual requirements. Christianity did away with these objections, and provided a loftier concept of God as well as a nobler ethic centered in the person of Jesus Christ. Paul's Christ welcomed all races, in contrast to Jewish exclusivism. This group of Greeks provided Paul with fertile soil on which to plant the seeds of the gospel in this Thessalonian synagogue.

Persecution begins

Because many were converting from Judaism to Christianity, the Jewish leaders saw Paul's message as a serious threat. They hired troublemakers to spread false accusations about him and his associates. A mob ended up storming Jason's house. But failing to find the missionaries, the mob dragged Jason before the politarchs. Jason was charged with harboring treasonous revolutionaries. These revolutionaries were supposedly teaching the people to disobey Roman law and to follow a king other than Caesar.

The politarchs saw through the motives of these Jewish zealots and required only that Jason guarantee that the missionaries would not disturb the city's peace any longer. Paul and his friends chose to leave Thessalonica to avoid further trouble.

Paul's first letter to Thessalonica

Upon leaving Thessalonica, Paul, Silas, and Timothy proceeded about forty miles west along the Egnatian Way to Berea. They ministered in this area for a short time until some of the hostile Thessalonian Jews tracked them down and incited the Berean Jews to expel them from their city.

Paul accordingly headed for Athens while Silas and Timothy remained in Berea. After arriving in Athens, he immediately sent a message back to his companions in Berea asking them to join him, which they did (see Acts 17:10-15; 1 Thessalonians 3:1-5).

When they met up again, Paul was so concerned about the Thessalonian converts that he decided to send Timothy back to Thessalonica in order to check on their welfare. The circumstances of his hasty departure had meant his new converts would be exposed to persecution for which they were scarcely prepared. Paul simply had not had sufficient time to give them all the basic teaching he thought they required.

After revisiting Thessalonica, Timothy rejoined Paul at his next stop, Corinth, with encouraging news (see Acts 18:1,5; 1 Thessalonians 3:6-7). In spite of heavy persecution, the Thessalonians were standing strong in their new faith. But Timothy's report also indicated that they were experiencing some problems for which they needed instruction from Paul. They sent questions back to Paul via Timothy, and Paul responded by writing a letter to them from Corinth. The letter is simply addressed to "the church of the Thessalonians in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."

Paul's second letter to Thessalonica

Paul's second letter quickly followed the first. Some scholars estimate that only weeks separate the two, while others believe that as many as six months had passed.³ Not much in the recipients' situation had changed, so Paul's purpose for writing 2 Thessalonians is very much the same as for 1 Thessalonians. Paul does correct some misunderstanding about the Lord's return and the necessity of working for a living in the meantime. Eschatology (the doctrine of "last things") was a major preoccupation of the believers in Paul's day, especially those at Thessalonica. Paul devoted much of his two letters to this vital, but often puzzling, subject.

Apocalyptic expectations at Thessalonica

Interest in the end times was keen in the early church, but nowhere more so than at Thessalonica. Almost 40 percent of Paul's correspondence to the Thessalonians is devoted to the doctrine of last things.

This doctrine of last things was a source of great comfort to those living under persecution. But many wondered whether loved ones who had died would miss out on Christ's return. Paul had to assure the Thessalonians that Christ's return would coincide with the resurrection of the dead, and that all Christians would be prepared for it—not because Christians are privy to its timing, but because true believers live in a state of permanent readiness for Christ's return.⁴

In 1 Thessalonians, Paul described Christ's return as imminent, happening without warning ("like a thief in the night," 1 Thessalonians 5:2). But in 2 Thessalonians, he describes a series of events—for example, a severe tribulation and large-scale apostasy—precipitated by the "man of lawlessness," all of which must take place before the end. In effect, all Christians have ample warning if they read the signs marking the "beginning of the end."

The leader of this large-scale apostasy is known as the "man of lawlessness" (2 Thessalonians 2:3), the "antichrist" (1 John 2:18), the "abomination that causes desolation" (Daniel 9:27; Matthew 24:15), "false messiahs" (Mark 13:22), and the "beast" (see Revelation 13:1-10). Two prototypes in history lie behind these images of the Antichrist: Antiochus Epiphanes (ruled 175–164 BC); and Emperor Gaius, also known as Caligula (ruled AD 37–41). Both demanded the worship reserved only for the one true and living God (see Daniel 11:36; 2 Thessalonians 2:4).

Lesser "antichrists" and "false messiahs" have been paving the way for the final Antichrist ever since. This Antichrist was understood in Jewish and Christian thought to be either a persecuting tyrant of Rome, the incarnation of Belial (see 2 Corinthians 6:15), a false prophet (see 1 John 4:1-3), a Jew, or even one of many regional enemies of Israel (see Isaiah 10:12-19; 14:4-21; Ezekiel 28:2-10).

When Christ returns in glory, this great rebel will be destroyed. Until then, the Antichrist or man of lawlessness will be restrained from full-scale evil (see 2 Thessalonians 2:6-7), perhaps by imperial Rome.⁵ On this particular wording, scholar F. F. Bruce adds, "Even after the Roman Empire passed

away, [this interpretation] did not become obsolete, for when the secular power in any form continues to discharge its divinely ordained commission, it restrains evil and prevents the outburst of anarchy.”⁶

Relation between the two letters

The two letters assume such similar circumstances in their audiences that they must have been sent out within a short interval of each other. The overlap between 1 and 2 Thessalonians is redundant at many points, and yet the eschatological outlook differs remarkably between the two. This raises questions about their relation to one another.

Why would a second, largely redundant, letter be needed so soon after the first? Could it be that each letter went to a distinct segment of the church, even two churches at Thessalonica—perhaps 1 Thessalonians to Gentile Christians (who have “turned to God from idols,” 1 Thessalonians 1:9), and 2 Thessalonians to Jewish Christians? Or could it be that both letters were sent at the same time, not to the same church at Thessalonica, but rather one to a different church in Macedonia—perhaps Berea or Philippi (in the latter event, yielding “1 and 2 Philippians”). The answer is wrapped up in the second question.

Which letter actually came first? The traditional New Testament sequence of Pauline letters (from Romans through Philemon) is based on length, not date. And 1 Thessalonians is almost twice the length of 2 Thessalonians, so it is placed first, but nothing in either letter requires that one precede the other. The arguments for the priority of 2 Thessalonians are chiefly these:⁷

1. The recipients of 2 Thessalonians are said to be currently suffering persecution (see 1:4-5), whereas 1 Thessalonians refers to persecution in the past tense (see 2:14).
2. The deplorable idleness of some church members has just come to the writer’s attention, prompting his reply in 2 Thessalonians (see 3:11-12), whereas this welfare mentality is a well-known fact to the writers and readers of 1 Thessalonians (see 4:10-12; 5:14).
3. The personal signature at the end of 2 Thessalonians (see 3:17) is meaningful only if this is the first letter to the addressees. The addressees, presumably, would not need such an explanatory footnote if this were the second letter from Paul.
4. The two sections of 1 Thessalonians that begin with “now about” (4:9; 5:1) may well be reconsidering topics already taken up in 2 Thessalonians: “love for one another” (1 Thessalonians 4:9, compare 2 Thessalonians 1:3) and “times and dates” (1 Thessalonians 5:1, compare 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12).

Against these arguments, the priority of 1 Thessalonians can be asserted:

1. The readers of 2 Thessalonians may be in receipt of a previous letter (see 2:15), whereas 1 Thessalonians makes no such reference to a previous letter.

2. The teaching in 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12 looks like a correction to believers who anticipated Christ's imminent return.

1. F. Jacobs, *Anthology Graecae*, vol. 2, no. 14, p. 98. Cited in Merrill F. Unger, *Archaeology and the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1962), 226.
2. Strabo, vol. 7, paragraphs 323 and 330. Compare Harold R. Willoughby, "Archaeology and Christian Beginnings," *Biblical Archaeology*, vol. 3 (September 1939), 32–33. Cited in Unger, 226.
3. Ronald A. Ward, *Commentary on 1 & 2 Thessalonians* (Waco, TX: Word, 1973), 127.
4. F. F. Bruce, *1 & 2 Thessalonians* (Waco, TX: Word, 1982), xxxvi–xxxix, 179–188.
5. Bruce, 188.
6. Bruce, 188.
7. Bruce, xli–xlii.

OVERVIEW OF 2 THESSALONIANS

Imagine receiving a letter from a trusted friend, one who has been through what you're going through and is offering valuable advice. You might take several approaches to the letter. You may read it through quickly, looking for first impressions and any news. You then read it a second time, taking time to savor it. After setting it aside, you may read it a third time, with pen in hand for note-taking and a considered response.

This overview lesson is like that. It asks you to read and reread this brief letter several times, each time with a different purpose or approach.

First impressions

1. a. Read through 2 Thessalonians quickly, looking for the overall message and first impressions. Is there any good news worth shouting about?

- b. Any bad news worth watching out for?

c. Any concerns to pray about?

d. What other reactions or impressions do you have after reading it?

2. a. Read Paul's letter again, this time more slowly. What do you notice about his mood? (Is he hopeful? Formal? Concerned? Thankful? Stern?)

b. Do you detect any shifts in mood? (Where? Why?)

3. Think about how Paul communicates his message. How would you describe the style or delivery of this letter? (Sermonic? Argumentative? Personal?)

4. a. Repetition, or how often an author uses certain words or phrases, gives a clue to the author's intent in writing a letter. What words or phrases occur over and over? (Hint: Don't get hung up on the exact wording used, as this may vary from translation to translation. Instead go for broad themes.)

b. What main themes or topics are suggested by these repeated words?

Broad outline

5. Read through 2 Thessalonians a third time (preferably in a different translation). Think of a short sentence that captures the main point or gives a title to paragraph divisions or other bite-size Scripture portions. The first one is done for you. (Paragraph divisions, even verse numbers and sentence punctuation, were not in the original Greek or Hebrew manuscripts, but were added centuries later for ease of reading. The divisions in your Bible may differ from the ones given here.)

After titling the smaller portions, give an overall title to each chapter or main block of Scripture.

1:1-12 _____

1:1-2 Paul, Silas, and Timothy greet believers at Thessalonica

1:3-4 _____

1:5-7a _____

1:7b-10 _____

1:11-12 _____

2:1-17 _____

2:1-2 _____

2:3-8 _____

2:9-10 _____

2:11-12 _____

2:13-15 _____

2:16-17 _____

3:1-18 _____

3:1-2 _____

3:3-5 _____

3:6-10 _____

3:11-15 _____

3:16-18 _____

After doing this outline procedure on your own, compare your outlines with each other and with the sample outline and chart provided (see pages 26 and 27). There is no single correct answer, so discuss in your group why you prefer one sentence summary over another.

Study Skill—Outlining

Outlining a passage will sharpen your focus and increase your retention of its main points. Outlining also helps us capture the flow or train of thought in the book. If it appears some points are subordinate to others, or if some points are mere particulars in relation to a larger general point, you can indicate that in your outline by using capital letters or Roman numerals for main points, and letters or numbers for secondary points. (If you see that the author digresses somewhere to make a sidebar comment, you can indicate that point with parentheses.) The outline below¹ is provided as a sample.

- I. Greeting from Paul, Silas, and Timothy (1:1-2)
- II. Doctrine as Ground of Encouragement and Challenge (1:3–2:17)
 - A. The Doctrine of Vindication (1:3-12)
 1. Thanksgiving an obligation (1:3-4)
 2. Fidelity and encouragement (1:5-10)
 3. Prayer a consequence (1:11-12)
 - B. The Doctrine of the Second Advent (2:1-17)
 1. The keynote: no alarm (2:1-2)
 2. The order of events (2:3-5)
 3. Secret activity temporarily restrained (2:6-7)
 4. ...
 5. ...
- III. Misbehavior as an Occasion for Admonition (3:1-16)
 - A. Request for Prayer (3:1-2)
 - B. Statement of Confidence (3:3-5)
 1. In the Lord (3:3)
 2. ...
 3. ...

6. Drawing from your own first impressions and outline summaries, what do you think was Paul's purpose(s) for writing this letter? (Hint: Wherever the author pauses to address his audience as "brothers and sisters," he is accenting a main point.)

1:3 _____

2:1-2 _____

2:13 _____

2:15 _____

3:1 _____

3:6 _____

Overall theme _____

7. If you have not already done so, read the historical background on pages 9–15 of this study guide. Did the introductory material get you to rethink some of your presumptions about the text? Explain.

Study Skill—Rhetorical Devices

People usually write letters or address an audience with a particular purpose in mind or some result they want to accomplish in the lives of their readers or listeners. Sometimes writers or speakers underscore their purpose by addressing their audience with a “reminder,” with a rhetorical question or statement (“Verily, verily, I say unto you”), or with some other rhetorical device that says, in effect, “This is it. Don’t miss this point.”

8. In your readings of 2 Thessalonians, what concepts did you come across that you are curious about and will warrant further study in the weeks to come? Jot down your questions below. (Some of your questions may be answered later in this study guide. The resources listed on pages 83–87 may help you answer the tougher questions.)

Your response

9. What does your group have in common with the original readers and hearers of 2 Thessalonians? (Note: Readers today might have a different purpose for studying the letter than the author had in addressing his original readers.)

10. Of all the things Paul was telling his audience to do, what could God be leading you and your group to do in the next several weeks? (See the “For the group” section.)

For the group

Warm-up. The beginning of a new group study is a good time to lay a proper foundation for honest sharing of personal goals and concerns, as well as insights from your Bible study. One way to establish common ground is to share what each member hopes to get out of this study of 2 Thessalonians. As you take several minutes to share your hopes and expectations, have someone write them down. Weeks from now you can look back at these goals to see if they are being met.

Discussion. Take turns sharing some of your “first impressions” (questions 1–4 in this lesson). Sharing from your notes will help members get comfortable with each other, and establish common ground for your study.

Likewise, take several minutes sharing your sentence summaries or titles (question 5), as well as any comparisons and insights gained from looking at the 2 Thessalonians chart on pages 26 and 27.

Don't try to harmonize all your answers, but discuss your differences. Learn why you prefer one sentence summary over another.

Consider the occasion or purpose of this letter (questions 6 and 7). What difficult concepts would the original readers and hearers of 2 Thessalonians have readily understood, but which you will need more time and in-depth study to understand (question 8)? Take your last ten minutes to share concerns. This input will affect how your group should pace future studies.

Wrap-up. Pray about how your group will blend your different strengths and backgrounds. Some of you will have strong analytic skills, others of you will be good at facilitating group discussion, or driving home a point of application. Give thanks that God has put your group together and be willing to help each other. Don't be embarrassed to give and request help. That's why you're studying this as a group, and not just as individuals.

How you divide the time spent in individual and group study will vary according to the group size and purpose, your members' familiarity with Bible study methods, the willingness of group members to do homework, and the optional questions in the margins. The number of weeks you want to spend on the overall book study will also guide the decision on how to pace the group.

A good rule of thumb for this opening overview study is to allot twenty minutes for individual study and note-taking, and twenty minutes for sharing your first impressions and outline summaries. The remainder of your hour can be spent in reviewing individual expectations and setting group goals.

This timeline assumes you assigned the "How to Use This Study" and the "Introduction" material as homework prior to this group session. If not, you will need another twenty minutes to review that.

Chart of 2 Thessalonians

Purpose: To encourage believers to persevere in faith, loving others as Christ did, working diligently, resisting evil, and hoping in the Lord's return—all so that believers might be worthy of and sure of God's calling.

- 1:1-12 The Lord’s Return Gives Impetus for Christian Growth
- 1:1-2 Paul, Silas, and Timothy greet believers at Thessalonica
- 1:3-4 Thessalonians are growing in faith and love, amidst trials
- 1:5-7a God’s judgments are right and just and merciful
- 1:7b-10 Unbelief and disobedience will be punished at the Lord’s return
- 1:11-12 Those worthy of God’s calling glorify Jesus by their faith
- 2:1-17 A Misunderstanding About the Lord’s Return
- 2:1-2 The Lord has not already come and passed them by
- 2:3-8 Blasphemous “man of lawlessness” is revealed and restrained
- 2:9-10 Satan deceives those who refuse the truth about Christ
- 2:11-12 God uses the big “lie” to punish unbelief and wickedness
- 2:13-15 Those loved, chosen, and saved by God’s Spirit obey the truth
- 2:16-17 God’s grace stirs up hope, faith, and love
- 3:1-18 A Lifestyle Befitting the Lord’s Return
- 3:1-2 Paul asks prayer for deliverance from faithless, evil people
- 3:3-5 God protects us from the Evil One
- 3:6-10 Paul condemns idleness, exemplifies what it means to work
- 3:11-15 Paul warns against idle busybodies
- 3:16-18 Paul extends grace and peace from Christ

1. Excerpted and adapted from Ronald A. Ward, *Commentary on 1 & 2 Thessalonians* (Waco, TX: Word, 1973), 131.