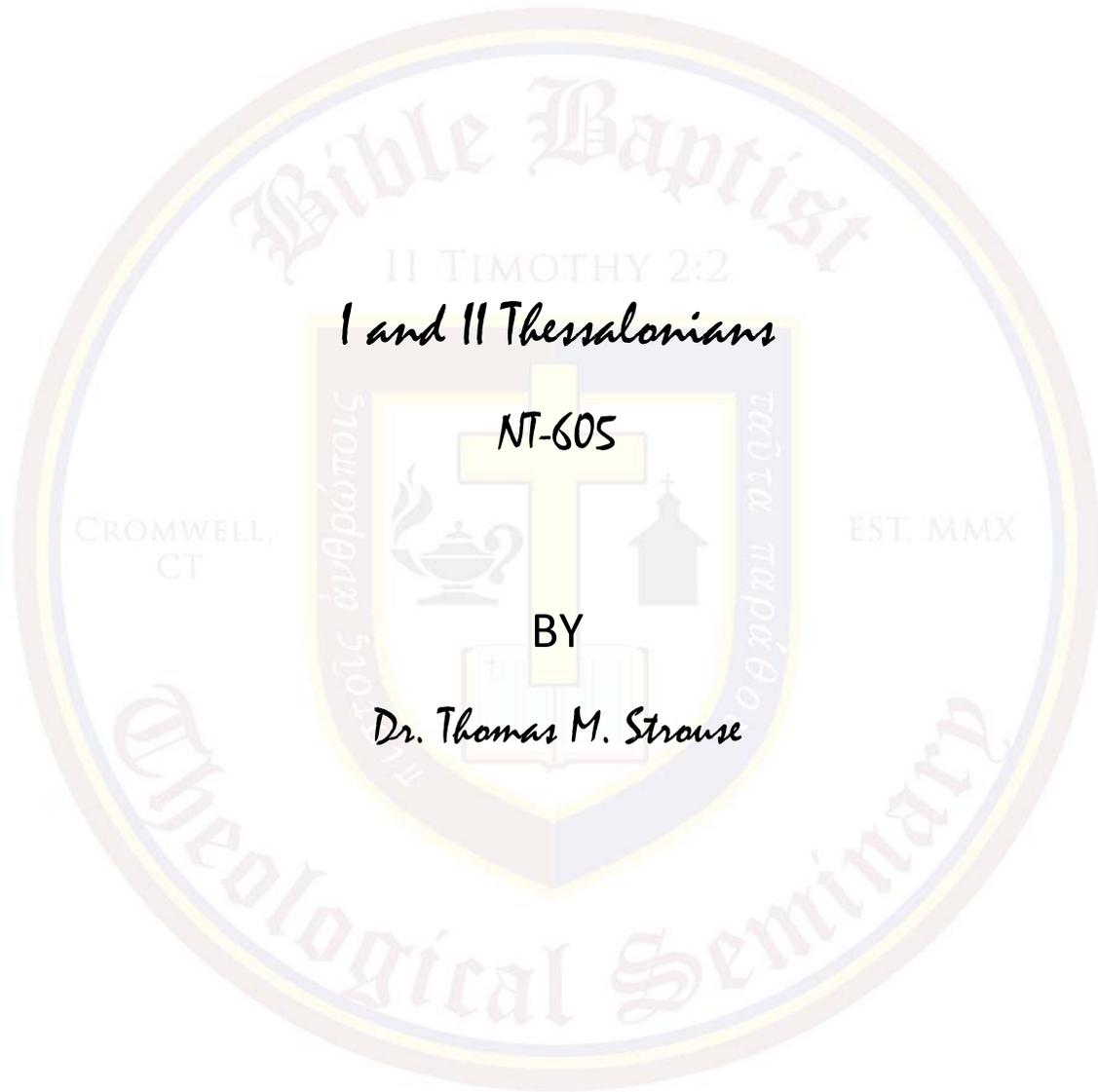


BIBLE BAPTIST THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY



CROMWELL, CONNECTICUT

I and II Thessalonians

NT 605

Introduction

The two Epistles to the Thessalonians are the product of the church planting ministry of the Apostle Paul and his colleagues, Silas and Timothy (cf. Acts 17:1-9). Paul had advanced the Gospel into Asia Minor on his first journey, and now he had followed the Lord's leading into Macedonia (cf. Acts 13-14; 16:6-10). Thessalonica was a key city in Macedonia, having been founded by Cassander in 315 BC and subsequently ruled by politarchs (cf. Acts 17:6). It possessed an ideal commercial advantage being in the head of the Thermaic Gulf. Under Roman control the city prospered economically, rivaling Asian cities such as Ephesus. Thessalonica had pagan idolaters and practiced gross immorality, but allowed in its midst a Jewish synagogue (indicating at least 10 Jewish men in the city). Eventually some of the inhabitants trusted in Christ and followed the Lord through the influence of Paul. Several of these Thessalonian servants of Christ were Demas (cf. II Tim. 4:10), Secundus (cf. Acts 20:4), Gaius (cf. Acts 19:29), and Aristarchus (cf. Acts 19:29; 20:4; and 27:2).

The Apostle declared that he taught the same truths in every assembly, stating, "*For this cause have I sent unto you Timotheus, who is my beloved son, and faithful in the Lord, who shall bring you into remembrance of my ways which be in Christ, as I teach every where in every church*" (I Cor. 4:17). Each church or church member he addressed in the Pauline corpus had spiritual and theological needs from respective sin within and without. Although he did not write about the same truths in full extent to every church, he dealt with the needs of the assembly or assembly member. The churches other than that of Thessalonica no doubt heard his preaching and teaching on eschatology, but the Thessalonians needed the inscripturated exegesis most. The churches in Rome needed the emphasis on justification, whereas the Corinthian assembly needed his condemnation of carnal division. As the thirteen gentile *Epistles* give the full theology of Paul, each church or church member needed their particular portion as well as the rest of the Pauline canon to have this full "Pauline theology." *The Epistles of I and II Thessalonians* contributed to the NT canon their unique eschatological teaching, especially concerning the Rapture.

Authorship and Date

Several patristics averred in favor of the Pauline authorship of the two *Epistles*, including Tertullian and Clement of Alexandria. Paul himself claimed authorship twice in *I Thessalonians* (1:1; 2:18) and twice in *II Thessalonians* (1:1; 3:17). Pauline authorship harmonizes with the Apostle's ministry in Macedonia as recorded by Luke in *Acts*. Having left Athens, Paul journeyed to and remained in Thessalonica three Sabbaths, evangelizing in the synagogue. Unbelieving Jews assaulted the home of Jason, assuming to find Paul and the assembly. Jason

was investigated and required to pledge a security (deposit [?]) stating that Paul would not return. Then he was released as Paul and Silas escaped and went to Berea. Later, Timothy joined Paul and reported that the church was doing well, but that there were moral and doctrinal problems developing. The Apostle wrote *I Thessalonians* about AD 50-51.¹ Shortly thereafter, Paul learned that some heretic had circulated a forged epistle to the Thessalonian church purporting to be from the Apostle (II Thes. 2:2),² and espousing a post-tribulation Rapture. He wrote *II Thessalonians* within months of the *First Epistle* and corrected some theological and practical eschatological errors of the Thessalonians.

The purpose of *I Thessalonians* was to encourage the church to continue on for the Lord and to instruct them further about eschatology. The purpose of his *Second Epistle* was along the same lines, to encourage and to expand teaching about the Day of the Lord, especially about the Tribulation time. Also, since some church members had become disorderly, he instructed the assembly in how to deal with such.

¹Since the Apostle appeared before the proconsul Gallio in Achaia around AD 51-52, he already had ministered in Thessalonica and no doubt had written his Thessalonian correspondence by then (cf. Acts 18:11-17).

²The canon and text of the New Testament Scriptures were under attack in the first century (cf. also II Pet. 3:15-16).

Outline of I Thessalonians

- I. Introduction (1:1-10)
 - A. Salutation (1:1)
 - B. Thanksgiving (1:2-10)
- II. Faith in the Thessalonians' Past (2:1-12)
 - A. Based on Knowledge (2:1-8)
 - B. Based on Remembrance (2:9-12)
- III. Love in the Thessalonians' Presence (2:13-4:12)
 - A. Their Strong Faithfulness (2:13-3:13)
 - B. Their Spiritual Flourishing (4:1-12)
- IV. Hope in the Thessalonians' Prospects (4:13-5:11)
 - A. Relative to the Rapture (4:13-18)
 - B. Relative to the Revelation (5:1-11)
- V. Conclusion (5:12-28)
 - A. Paul's Final Exhortation (5:12-22)
 - B. Paul's Final Exaltation (5:23-28)

Exegesis of I Thessalonians

Chapter One

Paul, along with two other apostles, Silvanus and Timotheus (1:1 with 2:6), fondly thanked the Lord for the church³ at Thessalonica and remembered their faith, love, and hope. He built his whole *Epistle* around this triad of spiritual virtues. He recognized that the Spirit of God had done a supernatural work in their lives,⁴ causing them to be a testimony throughout Greece as they forsook their idols and turned to God for redemption. They had been grounded theologically and sufficiently through Paul's teaching to realize their individual and collective responsibility "*to wait for his Son from heaven*" (v. 10).⁵

Chapter Two

The Apostle defended his ministry against unbelieving Jews and developed an outline of Christian characteristics for the servant of Christ. He treated the new converts at Thessalonica as if he were a nursing mother and a loving father. He commended them for receiving his preachment as the word of God and identifying with Christ in the persecution Paul received from

³The Greek behind "*church*" is ἐκκλησία (115x) and refers to an assembly or congregation throughout the NT, whether secular (i.e., Acts 19:32, 39, and 41) or sacred (i.e., Mt. 16:18).

⁴As the Thessalonians received Paul's preaching which ultimately was inscripturated as his inspired *Epistles* (cf. I Thes. 1:6; 2:13), they joined in the Received Bible mindset movement which began with the Saviour (cf. Jn. 17:8).

⁵Doctrinal and practical eschatology were at the forefront of the apostle's missionary instructional thrust at Thessalonica (I Thes. 1:9-10; 4:14-18; 5:1-11; II Thes. 1:6-10; 2:2-12).

the unbelieving Jews. He was taken away (ἀπορφανισθέντες)⁶ because of this persecution, and hindered in returning because of Satan.

Chapter Three

Paul had sent Timothy back to Thessalonica to check on the church, and his son in the faith brought an encouraging report back to the Apostle. Paul could not return to Thessalonica because of Jason's pledge (cf. Acts 17:9), but he enjoyed the good report of their faith and charity and desire to see him. The Apostle had been praying night and day⁷ that they would grow and God answered that request.

Chapter Four

However, the Thessalonians had some pre-conversion baggage about morality and so the Apostle enjoined them to godly living. Other social issues concerned some who had the attitude that they could cease their employment because of the soon coming of Christ. This led Paul to deal with the fact that since some Christians died before Christ came back, they would be resurrected first.⁸ He affirmed that both the dead and alive saints would be caught up together to meet Christ in the clouds. This teaching is commonly known as the Rapture⁹ of those saints "*in Christ*" (a soteriological term).

Chapter Five

With several contrasts ("*ye—they, you---them, light—darkness, day—night, us—others*"), the Apostle showed that the church age saints would not go into the Day of the Lord,¹⁰ including into the wrath of God during the Tribulation (cf. Rev. 3:10). He concluded with several practical considerations within the local church while waiting on the Son from Heaven. They were to edify themselves, esteem their leaders, and minister to all with their Christian behavior. He concluded with his benediction and blessings for the brethren.

⁶His sudden departure was as if he were orphaned away from the Thessalonians, since he used the *aorist* passive participle from ἀπορφανίζω (1x).

⁷The Apostle practiced what he preached; "*pray without ceasing*" (I Thes. 5:17).

⁸Paul had the privilege to teach the mystery of the pre-Tribulation rapture (cf. I Cor. 15:51-52), since the OT saints had been taught that their resurrection program would begin after the Tribulation (cf. Isa. 26:19; Dan. 12:1-3).

⁹The English is a form of the Latin *Vulgate's rapiemur*, the rendering for "*shall be caught up*" (ἀρπαγησόμεθα).

¹⁰According the Zechariah "*the Day of the Lord*" will include the Tribulation and the Millennium (Zech. 14:1 ff.). In essence, it is the Lord's day of dealing with unbelieving Israel in judgment (seven years) and believing Israel in blessing (one thousand years).

Outline of II Thessalonians

- I. Introduction (1:1-5)
 - A. Salutation (1:1-2)
 - B. Thanksgiving (1:3-5)
- II. The Thessalonians and Difficulties (1:6-12)
 - A. Encouragement about Lord's Revenge (1:6-9)
 - B. Encouragement about Lord's Reward (1:10-12)
- III. The Thessalonians and the Day of the Lord (2:1-3:5)
 - A. The Forgery Reported (2:1-2)
 - B. The Apostasy Commenced (2:3)
 - C. The Antichrist Revealed (2:4-12)
 - D. The Faith Required (2:13-3:5)
- IV. The Thessalonians and Discipline (3:6-15)
 - A. The Command (3:6)
 - B. The Charge (3:7-13)
 - C. The Consequence (3:14-15)
- V. Conclusion (3:16-18)

Exegesis of II Thessalonians

Chapter One

Paul continued be thankful for the growth of the assembly members at Thessalonica, especially in light of their persecution. He assured them that God could bring imminent Tribulation with the sudden Rapture on those who were causing the Thessalonians tribulation. His plan will be “*to recompense*” (ἀνταποδοῦναι) judgment on the wicked. The unrighteous will be thrown into the physical punishment of fire and receive eternal death, separated from God.¹¹ In the meantime he prayed for these church members.

Chapter Two

Some of the Thessalonians apparently were confused about eschatology because of a forged “Pauline” letter.¹² They thought they had missed the Rapture, presumably because they were facing afflictions, and believed that they were in the Tribulation (i.e., in the day of Christ). Paul assured the church members that two indicators must occur before one would know he was in the Tribulation. These indicators would be the Final Apostasy (cf. II Tim. 3:13) energized by the Final Antichrist (cf. I Jn. 2:18). If they did not observe these indicators, they were not in the Tribulation—**no observation, no involvement**. Paul gave details about the “*man of sin*” who is

¹¹Believers will have the visual and moral capacity to look upon the wicked in the Lake of Fire, observing their worm-like carcasses throughout eternity in the unquenchable fire (cf. Isa. 66:24).

¹²The Greek ἐπιστολῆς ὡς δι’ ἡμῶν literally reads “an epistle as through us.”

hindered from coming until One Who “*letteth*” (ὁ κατέχων)¹³ is “removed” via the Rapture. The Tribulation will be a time of excessive trouble coupled with demonic deception and delusion.¹⁴ The Apostle gave thanks for the Thessalonians and enjoined them to remain faithful to his previous instruction.

Chapter Three

Paul sought the Thessalonians’ prayers as he faced difficulties, and then dealt with some of the Thessalonians who were walking contrary to his inspired Scriptures. Apparently some had ceased their employment waiting for the Rapture.¹⁵ This led to their dependence on other church members for food and money, and Paul rebuked this practice. The Apostle encouraged the obedient to impose separation from the wayward brethren to embarrass them before addition church discipline.¹⁶ He concluded with his standard benediction—“*the salutation of Paul with mine own hand.*”¹⁷

¹³Since the “hinderer” is more powerful than the Antichrist, the word must refer to deity—i.e., the Holy Spirit. The Spirit’s ministry of permanent indwelling (Jn. 14:17) will cease temporarily during the Tribulation, since all indwelt believers will be caught away, and hence that special, divine presence through believers will cease.

¹⁴“*For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect*” (Mt. 24:24).

¹⁵They apparently had the opportunity to receive employment and rejected it.

¹⁶Apparently, this was the preliminary and very brief step before church discipline.

¹⁷Paul’s divine authority for the Gentiles was his apostleship (cf. Gal. 1:1; 2:7). Not so with the Jews however, since only their Scriptures were authoritative for doctrine and practice. Thus, he developed his “*word of exhortation*” (cf. Heb. 13:22) based on OT citations as he exhorted the Jews to trust in the prophesied Son Jesus of Nazareth, the Messiah, in *Hebrews*.

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