



## LETTERS FOR TODAY: 2 THESSALONIANS 1

Paul's interest in his Thessalonian converts did not end when he sent his first letter. His approach to ministry including ongoing discipleship with those he had won to Christ. Reports of three recent developments in the church prompted him to write a second letter. The persecution had increased and led some in the congregation to conclude that they were living in the time of the Tribulation. Then, a false letter, supposedly from Paul, had convinced some of them that the end times were already present. Others concluded that Christ's imminent coming meant they should quit their jobs and spend their time waiting for him. So, specific problems that Paul had addressed in his first letter (2:2, 15; 3:11) had intensified. While correcting certain misunderstandings about Jesus' coming, he expands his teaching on the end time. He explains its retributive nature, the events preceding it, and proper conduct until it happens. He also sketches the character and destiny of the "man of lawlessness; who must be revealed before Jesus comes.

The letter follows Paul's standard structure of opening (1:1-12), (1:3-12), body (2:1-3:15), and closing (3:16-18). The opening consists of a salutation (1:1-2), a thanksgiving (1:3-10), and a prayer report (1:11-12). Together, the message of the thanksgiving and prayer report is

*Although they are currently experiencing suffering (1:3-5), the Thessalonians should persevere in their walk with Christ (1:11-12), because they will experience relief when Jesus comes (1:6-10).*

### Paul praises their perseverance and faith in the midst of suffering (2 Thess. 1:3-5).

The fact that Paul uses three different words in these verses—"persecutions and afflictions" in verse 4 and "suffering" in verse 5—reinforces the Thessalonians' circumstances. He had mentioned those circumstances in his first letter, where he focused particularly on Jewish residents of the city as the persecutors (1 Thess. 2:14-16; cf. 2:2). Despite severe affliction, the Thessalonians gave reason Paul for thanksgiving. Both their faith and their love had grown (1:3), and he was quick to tell others about their perseverance in the midst of affliction (1:4). In fact, their spiritual growth demonstrated their fitness to participate in God's kingdom (1:5).

### Paul promises relief from their suffering (2 Thess. 1:6-10).

Although they were currently experiencing affliction, Jesus' coming would reverse the Thessalonians' circumstances. His coming would be powerful (1:7), glorious (1:9), and marvelous (1:10). God would repay their persecutors with affliction (1:6), retribution (1:8), and eternal separation from God's presence (1:9). In turn, he would reward the Thessalonians with relief (1:7) and glory (1:10) because they had believed what Paul, Silas, and Timothy had taught them.

### Paul prays for their progress while they endure suffering (2 Thess. 1:11-12).

Paul was not content, however, for the Thessalonians to stand still in their spiritual growth (cf. 1 Thess. 3:11-13), wanted them to make even more progress. So, he prayed that God would help them live up to their calling, fulfill their longing for goodness, and glorify God by their works of faith.

Suffering is a fact of the Christian life. In Philippians, Paul wrote that it has been granted to Jesus' followers both to believe in him and to suffer for him (Phil. 1:29). He also told the churches he had planted in Galatia that "through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God" (Acts 14:22), a statement that echoes 2 Thessalonians 1:5. When we are in the midst of suffering, our calling is to persevere and expect to continue growing in our walk the Christ. Jesus' return give us good reason to do both. Paul's point is . . .

***Jesus' return gives us confidence to persevere in times of suffering.***

### Getting Personal

Take some time to read through 2 Thessalonians 1:1-12. Then, reflect on how you would answer the following questions.

1. What do you respond to suffering and times of trouble? Does your response challenge others to speak proudly of what they see (1:3-5)?
2. How is Jesus' coming a source of comfort and challenge to you as you think about the reversal of fortunes it will bring (1:6--10)? How does that reversal affect the way you think about others around you?
3. Do you pray for others in the same way that Paul prayed for the Thessalonians (1:11-12)? Are you as concerned for others' spiritual growth as he was for his converts?
4. How can you use the truth about Jesus' coming to challenge and/or comfort another believer this week?