THE JEWISH
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NEW TESTAMENT

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Bible Translation

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Editors

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THE SECOND LETTER OF PAUL TO THE THESSALONIANS

NAME AND CANONICAL STATUS
The book of 2 Thessalonians appears to be a letter by Paul (1:1; 3:7) to an all-Gentile church in the Greek city of Thessalonica.

AUTHORSHIP, DATE
As early as the second century CE, Christians accepted Paul's authorship of the letter. Some modern scholars agree. Accepting 1 Thessalonians as authentic, they claim that 2 Thessalonians was written to correct misunderstandings in the first letter (2:2). They note references to an earlier work (2:15; 3:17), and parallels between the letters in language, structure, and subjects addressed, especially eschatology. However, many modern scholars, perhaps most, doubt Pauline authorship; accepting 1 Thessalonians as authentic, they note differences in eschatological scenarios. They contrast the imminence and unpredictability of the end in 1 Thessalonians with the futuristic, drawn-out scenario of 2 Thessalonians. Other indications of non-Pauline authorship include the harsher tone of the second letter (3:4–12; cf. 1 Thess 1–2) and self-conscious insistence on Pauline authorship (3:17). The appeal to Paul's authority (3:4–11) and demand for faithfulness to earlier tradition (2:15; 3:6) may also fit a post-Pauline period.

With no certainty about authorship and little specific information on setting (e.g., the description of persecution in 1:6 is vague), date and context are unknown. If Pauline, the letter was probably written shortly after the 1 Thessalonians, in the early 50s, if inauthentic, a late first-century date seems likely. A later author may have crafted a letter appealing to Paul's authority to squelch fervor about the end of days.

Even though the context is murky, the problems raised in the letter are clear: persecution, disagreements about the end-times, and refusal to work. The author alternately consoles and reproves. He exhorts his congregation to accept his interpretations and avoid false teachings (2:3; 10; 3:6). Facing internal divisions, he insists that they adhere to his traditions. Against those preaching that the end is imminent, he offers an alternative scenario. A series of steps must occur, including a painful period of increasing wickedness (2:3–12). Against those "living in idleness," perhaps believing the end has arrived, he insists that they work (3:11).

The language is dualistic, dividing insiders from outsiders (including dissenting followers of Jesus). The author criticizes those without faith or understanding (3:2; 14) and welcomes God's destruction of opponents (1:8–9). The counterpart to denunciation is assurance that God protects believers. In a parallel to Jewish ideas of God's election of Israel (e.g., Deut 7:6), he insists on believers' 'ness (1:11; 2:13–14). Though they suffer now, God will soon send them relief (1:7).

HISTORICAL CONTEXT, LITERARY HISTORY
Although the letter generally received less attention from later Christians, the section on eschatology did interest some commentators. Its vagueness led to speculation, for example, about who or what held back the "lawless one"; some even said the Roman Empire, by maintaining social order, prevented his arrival (Tertullian, Apol. 32; J. Chrys., Hom. 2 Thess. 4). Others reapplied the letter to contemporary contexts: Cnesius found evidence of a second god in 2:4 (Irenaeus, Adv. Haer. 3:6.5), and Reformation-era polemics denounced both Luther and the pope as the "lawless one." It was a resource for church leaders, because its portrait of a confident, even authoritarian Paul offered a model of a strong bishop (Caesarius of Arles, Sermon 232). Also, the demand for faithfulness to tradition buttressed later opponents of views deemed novel or heretical.

The author addresses Gentiles. He says nothing about Jews or Judaism and quotes no biblical verses. However, he is deeply indebted to Jewish thought, and allusions to biblical and postbiblical texts abound. The author draws ideas from scenarios about divine deliverance for oppressed and suffering Jews (e.g., Dan 7–12; 12 En.; 4 Ezra; 2 Bar.). These scenarios include often-enigmatic human and supernatural antagonists, and furnish the author with relevant imagery; e.g., "the lawless one" (2:3), "Satan" (2:9), and one who "exalts himself" (2:4). The tension between the view that the end has arrived, and yet the final consummation is still to come, is present in Jewish texts (cf. DSS, esp. 1QH).

The author also appropriates Jewish theological concepts and images. He affirms God's election of the community (1:11; 2:13–14) and promises divine vengeance on opponents of God's people (1:5–10). For these claims, he employs biblical images of sacrifice (2:13) and angels (1:7). Notably, he avoids supersessionism (i.e., he does not reject the Jews); rather, the Jews are simply ignored. If the author is not Paul, his background is unknown, though Paul has a thorough grounding in Jewish thought.

Adam Gregory

Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy.
To the church of the Thessalonians in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ:
1 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

2 We must always give thanks to God for you, brothers and sisters, as is right, because your faith is growing abundantly, and the love of every one of you for one another is increasing. Therefore we ourselves boast of you among the churches of God for your steadfastness and faith during all your persecutions and the afflictions that you are enduring.

3 This is evidence of the righteous judgment of God, and is intended to make you worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are also suffering. For it is indeed just of God to repay with affliction those who afflict you and to give relief to the afflicted as well as to us, when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.

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5 This is evidence of the righteous judgment of God, and is intended to make you worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are also suffering. For it is indeed just of God to repay with affliction those who afflict you and to give relief to the afflicted as well as to us, when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.

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These will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, separated from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might, when he comes to be glorified by his saints and to be marveled at on that day among all who have believed, because our testimony to you was believed.

To this end we always pray for you, asking that our God will make you worthy of his call and will fulfill by his power every good resolve and work of faith, so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

As to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered together to him, we beg you, brothers and sisters, not to be quickly shaken in mind or alarmed, either by spirit or by word or by letter, as though from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord is already here. Let no one deceive you in any way; for that day will not come unless the rebellion comes first and the lawless one is revealed, the one destined for destruction. He opposes and exalts himself above every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, declaring himself to be God. Do you not remember that I told you these things when I was still with you? And you know what is now restraining him, so that he may be revealed when his time comes. For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work, but only until the one who now restrains it is removed. And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will destroy with the breath of his mouth, annihilating him by the manifestation of his coming. The coming of the lawless one is apparent in the working of Satan, who uses all power, signs, lying wonders, and every kind of wicked deception for those who are perishing, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. For this reason God sends them a powerful delusion, leading them to believe what is false, so that all who have not believed the truth but took pleasure in unrighteousness will be condemned.

But we must always give thanks to God for you, brothers and sisters beloved by the Lord, because God chose you as the first fruits for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and through belief in the truth. For this purpose he called you through our proclamation of the good news, so that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. So then, brothers and sisters, stand firm and hold fast to the traditions that you were taught by us, either by word of mouth or by our letter.

Now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and through grace gave us eternal comfort and good hope, comfort your hearts and strengthen them in every good work and word.

Finally, brothers and sisters, pray for us, so that the word of the Lord may spread rapidly and be glorified everywhere, just as it is among you, and that we may be rescued from wicked and evil people; for not all have faith. But the Lord is faithful; he will strengthen you and guard you from the evil one. And we have confidence in the Lord concerning you, that you are doing and will go on doing the things that we command. May the Lord direct your hearts to the love of God and to the steadfastness of Christ. Now we command you, beloved, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, to keep away from believers who are living in idleness and not according to the tradition that they received from us. For you yourselves know how you ought to imitate them; we were not idle when we were with you, and we did not eat anyone’s bread without paying for it; but with toil and labor we worked night and day, so that we might not burden any of you. This was not because we do not have that right,

people: 1 Kings 22.23 (false prophets); Isa 6.10 (Israel); cf. Rom 11.7–8, 10. Truth, not a generic term, it refers specifically to the “traditions” they were taught; 2:19. Saved, recalls the rewards in 1:5,7,9.

2:13–17: Second thanksgiving. Parallels 1 Thess 2:13, though not necessarily evidence that either letter is composite. 13: First fruits, if correct (see translators’ note b), believers are likened to a Temple offering (Jer 2:3) affirming God’s faithfulness to biblical promises; Rom 8.25; 1 Cor 15.20. Sanctionification, “making holy” or being set apart by the Spirit as a worthy offering. 15: Summarizing his response to all threats—of persecution, confiscation, and dispersion—the author demands that readers accept his traditions; 3:1, 4:8. On faithfulness in tradition, see Deut 31:2–32; Josephus, Ap. Ag. 2.23; m. Avot 3.17. 16–17: See 1 Thess 3.2.11–13.

1:5– Prayer and encouragement. 1: Spread rapidly and be glorified, reflects Christian missionary impulse: successful preaching leads to glorification of God; Mt 5.16; Acts 13.48; Rom 15.9. 3: The evil one may be Satan in 2.9: 5: Direct your hearts, Jewish language of religious intention; Ps 101.7; 1 Chr 29.18; m. Men. 13.11; b. Ber. 17a: regardless of one’s level of learning, what is most important is that “one directs one’s heart to heaven.”

3.6–13: Denunciation of idleness. 6: Living in idleness, perhaps because they believed the evil had arrived, though the connection to 2.2 is not explicit; 1 Thess 4.11. Name, see 3:12; 3 Cor 6.4. Eph 4.17; 1 Thess 4.1.6 (also 10.12); Command, stern language, demonstrating the seriousness of the threat. 7: 9a. Imitate, 1 Cor 4.16; 11.13; Phil 3.17; 5. Ber. 22a, on inuating the actions of the rabbis in all areas of life. 8: Tell and labor, Jews and Christians praised labor; Prov 10.4; 1 Thess 2.9; 13.12–14; Did. 12.4.5; Mek. Ex. 20.9; m. Avot 2.2, praises combining Torah study and labor, though not all rabbis worked. Some were wealthy, and others were paid a fee for teaching or expected to be supported by the community; cf. Sir 38.24. Idleness may have been unseemly in the eyes of non-Christian neighbors, though some pagans disdained labor, at least by the learned; 1 Thess 4.12. 9: Right, see 1 Cor 9.4–5.
The First Letter of Paul to Timothy

Introduction
First and Second Timothy, along with Titus, are known as the "Pastoral Epistles"; despite differences among them, they are commonly grouped together. The term "Pastoral Epistles," though it is not used in the letters themselves, has been used for these three letters because they are concerned mostly with the life and rules governing individual Christian communities. Although presented as a short, personal letter written by the apostle Paul to Timothy, a co-missionary who remained in Ephesus to guide the nascent community, 1 Timothy's Pauline authorship is doubted. The themes and issues are different from Paul's concerns with justification and are more focused on matters of dissent within the communities. The concept of faith presented here—that of "sound teaching" (4.6)—differs from that in the genuine letters of Paul, for instance Gal 3.6–9. The tone and vocabulary of these epistles differ from Paul's undisputed letters. On the one hand they share commonality with popular Greek ethical writings, and on the other they speak of Jesus' epiphany, moral uprightness, and community traditions to be kept, rather than Jesus' second coming, justification, and trust in God. It is therefore more likely, in the view of scholars, that these letters are attributed to Paul but not written by him. The attribution of letters and other texts to past worthies was known in various contexts: Jewish (e.g., 1 Enoch), pagan (e.g., the so-called Homeric Hymns, odes to the gods in the style of Homer but almost certainly not by him), as well as in early Christian history (e.g., the Gospel of Thomas), and it is possible the Pastoral Epistles represent the views of late first- or early second-century Christians who appealed to Paul for their authority.

According to Acts (16.1) Timothy is the son of a Jewish mother and a Greek father. If pseudonymous, the letter's choice of Timothy (rather than some other disciple) makes sense, for Timothy, who accompanied Paul in Lystra, accompanied the apostle in some cities, represented him in others, and often co-signed his letters (e.g., 2 Cor 1.1; Phil 1.1; 1 Thess 1.1; Philem 1).

Interpretation
Paul sought to prepare his churches for Jesus' imminent return (see 1 Thess 4). In some of his undisputed letters, and particularly in later legendary stories (such as the apocryphal second-century Acts of Paul and Thecla), Paul can be understood as erasing the distinctions between slave and free and between male and female (see Gal 3.28) as well as advocating celibacy (see 1 Cor 7.27). This understanding led some of his followers to refuse the social conventions of slavery and marriage. The delay of the "coming of the Lord" (1 Thess 4.15) prompted others to insist on conformity to prevailing Roman social values: slaves were to be obedient to their masters; women and men were to marry and procreate; husbands and fathers were to rule their homes. In this corrective mode, the Pastoral Epistles present Paul as supporting the status quo.

Naomi Kolson-Fromm