

## 2 Thessalonians (September 22)

### Reading 2 Thessalonians

As the patient groans, the physician uses a knife to split a stiff, 5-foot reed. Attendants place the halves of the reed on either side of the patient's hip and press the ends until they flex and touch one another, so they can be bound as a splint. As the attendants press the reeds, the physician waves a knife over the splint and chants, "Motas uaeta darles dardares..." which no one can understand. "This will heal you," the physician claims, "you must chant each day, 'Haut haut haut istasis tarsis...'"

Magic rites and mock miracles, which deceived many, were part of daily life for ancient Greeks and Romans. In 2 Thessalonians, Paul warns of a far more powerful deception that will come before the end of time. The "lawless one" will use false signs and miracles to delude people into following him. Though Paul warns the Thessalonians about this coming deception, he also focuses them on living each day by the gospel, the most important truth of all.

### Author, Date, and Place of Writing

Paul's authorship of 2 Thessalonians has been questioned more often than that of 1 Thessalonians, in spite of the fact that it has more support from early Christian writers. Objections are based on internal factors rather than on the adequacy of the statements of the church fathers. It is thought that there are differences in the vocabulary (ten words not used elsewhere), in the style (it is said to be unexpectedly formal) and in the eschatology (the doctrine of the "man of lawlessness" is not taught elsewhere). However, such arguments have not convinced current scholars. A majority still hold to Paul's authorship of 2 Thessalonians.

Because of its similarity to 1 Thessalonians, it must have been written not long after the first letter – perhaps about six months. The situation in the church seems to have been much the same. Paul probably penned it circa AD 51 or 52 in Corinth, after Silas and Timothy had returned from delivering 1 Thessalonians.

### Purpose

Inasmuch as the situation in the Thessalonian church has not changed substantially, Paul's purpose in writing is very much the same as in his first letter to them. He writes to encourage persecuted believers, to exhort the Thessalonians to be steadfast and to work for a living, and to correct some misunderstandings concerning the Lord's return.

Apparently there was a misunderstanding of 1 Thessalonians by some members in regard to the second coming of Christ, mentioned six times in that letter. Some probably became fearful and alarmed that they were expected to be "blameless" at Jesus' second advent. Paul calms their fear in his second letter by assuring them that they are beloved by the Lord because God chose them from the beginning, and thus their salvation depends on God's election, not on their sinlessness. Others concluded from Paul's frequent references to the second coming of Jesus that it would be advisable to give up their gainful employment to get ready for this event, which they assumed could come any day, in the immediate future. These members became idle and disorderly, depending on the charity of the church. To this group Paul writes that the "man of lawlessness" must come first and also gives guidance to correct their disorderly life.

### Blessings for Readers

As in 1 Thessalonians, Paul exhibits exemplary pastoral care for the Thessalonian congregation. He patiently explains issues of doctrine that have confused them and instructs them consistently in matters of faith and life, according to the traditions that he had taught them. Though the end times appear fascinating, Paul demonstrates once again that applying law and gospel for daily living has the greatest importance. Through law and gospel, the Lord prepares us for the persecution at the end and Jesus' blessed return.