

# The Teaching of 2 Thessalonians 1:4-10

As with practically every letter Paul wrote, Second Thessalonians was written to Christians who were suffering at the hands of Jews who despised Jesus and this new sect that had arisen among them, popping up all over the Roman Empire where they had synagogues.

In this short epistle, Paul immediately began writing about the comfort these Christians were sure to receive ... as well as the suffering their persecutors were sure to receive for their rejection of Jesus as the prophesied and promised Messiah. Let's begin our study of chapter 1 with...

**Verses 4-5: We boast of you among the churches of God for your patience and faith (in all your persecutions and tribulation which you endure) which is manifest evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God for which you also suffer.** Ya know...

These, our first-generation Christian brethren of Thessalonica, endured torment for accepting Jesus as the Christ from the very outset. In 1 The. 1:6 Paul brought up how they had "become followers of the Lord, receiving the Word in much affliction." Then...

After speaking of the suffering that Christians of Judea in general had endured at the hands of the Christ-rejecting Jews, Paul, in 2:14-15, continued to say to them, "you also suffered the same things from your countrymen just as they did from the Jews who killed both the Lord Jesus and their own prophets and have persecuted us." So...

It's no surprise that the second letter we have from Paul to these brethren starts off essentially the same way, i.e. with his praising them for their perseverance in the face of adversity ... adversity that came their way merely because they chose to believe in Jesus of Nazareth as their Lord and Messiah.

It's interesting to me that Paul chose a Greek word (*hupomone*) for "patience" in verse 4 that, as Wilbur Fields in his commentary on 2 The. said (and as Thayer agrees), carries with it not merely "steadfastness," but also a steadfastness motivated by a hope or "expectation of help and victory." Interestingly, in fact...

In 1 The. 1:3 Paul connected *hupomone* to the specific Greek word for "hope" as if to emphasize this very point. Furthermore...

In the Greek of Jeremiah 14:8 & 17:13 we have the Lord being referred to as "the hope of Israel," indicating to me that "the patience of Christ" in 2 The. 3:5 could actually be translated as "the hope of Christ." Also interesting is this:

Though the two terms are inverted, Paul, as if recalling the Lord's *Parable of the Sower*, referred to persecutions and tribulations these brethren had and were enduring as if to praise them for not doing what the Lord in Mark 4:17 said many would do in their "rocky-ground" situation: "When tribulation and persecution arises for the sake of the Word, immediately they stumble." By the way...

It's very important to note here that, though there's very little difference between the words for "persecution" and "tribulation," the former refers to being pursued, while the latter (viz. *thlipsis*) refers to pressure, oppression, intense distress.

We'll be coming back to *thlipsis* in verse 6, so hold on to it.

Based upon their "patience and faith" in the face of "persecutions and tribulations," I see Paul in verse 5 as having made two points for their encouragement: "{1} You brethren should have no problem comprehending why God is justified in bringing judgment upon those Christ rejectors; and {2} Your perseverance under this undeserved suffering is authenticating your worthiness for the kingdom of God." [Php. 1:28 is a twin to 2 The. 1:5.] So...

**Verses 6-8: It's a righteous thing with God to repay with tribulation those who trouble you and to give you (who are troubled) rest with us when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.**

The original word (*thlipsis*) for "trouble" in verse 6 and "troubled" in verse 7 is merely the verb form of "tribulation" in verses 4 & 6, and Thayer defined it as "to press hard upon," thus being under pressure; so these, our brethren, endured acute harrassment by their Jewish brethren, something which began immediately upon their acceptance of Jesus as Messiah according to Acts 17:5-9. Due to this...

As Paul already brought up in verse 5, God was righteous to turn the tables on these persecutors of His people, giving them a taste of their own medicine, so to speak. In fact, doesn't what Paul said in verse 6 sound like the "eye-for-an-eye-and-tooth-for-a-tooth" principle of Exodus 21:23-25? Not only was He righteous in executing that punishment, but...

God was also righteous in providing rest to those who were having to experience that undue suffering, especially since it was all on account of God's Son for whom these brethren were taking a stand; see, it was a two-sided coin, meaning that by visiting tribulation upon the tribulators, they'd be too busy with their own self-preservation to be concerned any longer with those "Christians." So...

To what was Paul referring by the word "rest" here? Well, it seems obvious to me that he was thinking of the opposite of what those brethren were experiencing, and they were experiencing times of extreme emotional and physical maltreatment; in fact, the Greek expression for "rest" here (*anesis*) refers to relief and relaxation, thus a release from *thlipsis* or being under pressure, and it's even translated as "liberty" or "freedom" in Acts 24:23. Now the question of the day is...

When did Paul promise these brethren they'd receive this much-desired peace? "When the Lord Jesus" would return "with His angels, in flaming fire" to take "vengeance," or, as verse 6 says, "to repay" the tribulators for their unjust oppression of God's people; incidentally, these are obviously the same people as "those who don't know God and those who don't obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus." [More literally this might read that the Lord's vengeance would be upon "those who, having not known God, are not submitting to the gospel"; rather, they're persecuting those who have.] Now why did I say my "when" question is "the question of the day"? Well, just consider the obvious:

Since the promise of Paul to these brethren from 2000 years ago was that their Messiah was going to bring them their much-deserved relief from suffering, I don't see how one can keep from wondering if he offered a false promise or if he, even though inspired by the Holy Spirit, was mistaken. BUT there *is* one other option, viz. that today's Christian world in general misunderstands the timing of the Lord's return, that which would bring relief to first-generation brethren; i.e., Paul would've been referring to Jesus' return as occurring before those to whom the apostle made this promise had died. See, Paul's assurance wasn't that they'd receive relief from suffering when they died (that which no one would've thought to be anything special); rather, they'd be relieved of their misery when Jesus returned in vengeance. By the way, there are plenty of other passages by Paul, indicating the same concept:

In 1 Cor. 1:7-8 he told the Corinthian brethren that the Lord would confirm them ... until when? ... until they died? ... nope ... until "the day of our Lord Jesus."

In 1 Tim. 6:14 he told Timothy to "keep the commandments" ... until when? ... until he died? ... nope ... "until the appearing of our Lord Jesus."

In Titus 2:13 he wrote to Titus to look forward to ... what? ... his death after which he'd see the Lord? ... nope ... but to look forward to ... "the blessed appearing of the Savior Jesus Christ." And...

In Heb. 10:25 he wrote about how that those first-generation Christian brethren could "see" ... see what? ... their deaths? ... nope ... but "the Day approaching."

We can add to this list a couple statements by James and even Jesus:

In James 5:7 James encouraged his first-generation Christian audience to "be patient" ... until when? ... until they died? ... nope ... "until the coming of the Lord." And...

In Rev. 2:25 Jesus encouraged His people to "'hold fast'" ... until when? ... until they died? ... nope ... "'until I come.'" So now you may well be asking...

"Since you're implying that Paul was writing about a first-century return of the Lord in 2 The. 1:4ff, then, since the world hasn't been burned up, what did Paul mean by 'flaming fire'?"

Ask yourself: With what city were the Thessalonian Christians' persecutors associated? And the answer is ... "Jerusalem." Jews – Jerusalem (just check out Acts 17 again); it was from this city with its sun, moon, and stars religious leaders that the edicts came down to men like Saul of Tarsus himself to imprison or even kill Christians. So what city with its temple was destroyed by the Lord via the Romans in flaming fire a few years following Paul's letters? Jerusalem. See...

When the Lord Jesus returned against the city of the people who had rejected and killed Him via His "mighty messengers," i.e. the Roman armies, He wiped out the primary source and origin of suffering, i.e. the Christian suffering associated with their break from the Law of Moses and their old mode of existence before the Messiah. Movin' on to...

**Verses 9-10: These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power, when He comes in that Day to be glorified in His saints and to be admired among all those who believe, because our testimony among you was believed.**

The punishment seems clear: It would be an eternal banishment from the Lord's presence and, as the Weymouth translation says, from His glorious majesty; this means that, since the events surrounding Jesus' destruction of Jerusalem would fulfill all prophecy (cf. Luke 21:22), the Old Covenant, having accomplished its purpose, could / would be rolled up and forever put away (cf. Heb. 1:10-12). Then at that point...

What little association the Old Covenant people had left with the Lord would be permanently cut off, leaving only the New Covenant people standing in His presence.

This was exactly what was prophesied in Daniel 7:21-22: "I was watching and the same horn was making war against the saints and prevailing against them until the Ancient of Days came and judgment was made in favor of the saints of the Most High; so the time came for the saints to possess the kingdom." And...

If one is motivated to take the time to consider (or reconsider his view on) Revelation chapters 18 & 19, it isn't hard to see this prophecy in Daniel 7 being retold in relation to first century events: chapter 18 speaks of the enemies of Christ prevailing against His new covenant people, while chapter 19 then shows the tide turn so that the Lord's new covenant people end up on the winning side with the Lord. And...

Paul, in the AD 50s, said here in 2 The. 1:10 (as did Daniel in 7:22) such would occur when the Lord came in that day ... that judgment day, as all agree, of course. BTW, who was "the Lord" here? The Lord Jesus, for such is what he said in verse 7. So, incidentally...

Jesus is the Ancient of Days in Daniel 7:13 & 21, and it was to Him that the Father gave the authority of judgment against the old covenant people who rejected and killed Him: By the time Jesus came on the scene He said that "The Father judges no one, but has committed all judgment to the Son" (John 5:22). Interestingly...

Jesus even said in the same conversation that "the Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He sees the Father do, for whatever He does, the Son also does in like manner" (v. 19). And how did the Son witness His Father judge? The Father brought judgment upon His Old Covenant people multiple times via invading armies; in fact, it was said of Yahweh that such was how He came against them, even with/in/on clouds (cf. Jer. 4:5ff & Eze. 20:33—21:5 concerning Babylon and Isa. 10:5-27 concerning Assyria). Now...

Note something else Jesus said: "The Son of Man will come in the glory of the Father with His angels, and then He'll reward each according to his works" (Mat. 16:27). Doesn't that sound like Jesus was saying that He'll render judgment the way His Father rendered judgment? It does to me, and such was exactly what Jesus did via the Roman armies against Jerusalem and Old Covenant Israel's temple in it, except this time it would be an eternal judgment, with Old Covenant Israel never rising again.

When all this transpired, the saints glorified/praised the Lord for avenging their blood/honor as His rightful people. Although the ones to whom Paul wrote at this time were still living, I think it's appropriate here to read some of Revelation concerning the fifth and seventh seals.

In Rev. 6:9f John wrote, "When He opened the 5th seal, I saw ... those who had been slain for God's word and for the testimony they held. And they cried out with a loud voice, saying, 'How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?' Then a white robe was given to each of them; and it was said to them that they should wait a little longer...." Then...

In Rev. 7 in relation to the 7th seal, John said, "After these things I beheld a great multitude..., saying, 'Blessing, glory, wisdom, thanksgiving, honor, power, and might be to our God forever and ever. Amen!' Then one of the elders asked, 'Who are these arrayed in white robes and where did they come from?' And I said to him, 'Sir, you know.' So he said to me, 'These are the one who came out of the great tribulation, and have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. So they are before the throne of God, serving Him day and night in His temple; and He who sits on the throne will dwell among them. They shall neither hunger nor thirst anymore; neither the sun nor heat shall strike them, for the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne will lead them to living fountains of waters. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.'" ☺

First Thessalonians 2:13-16 are saying essentially the same thing, and no one seems to deny that that passage concerns AD 70. Hmmm. [Oh, let's don't forget how 2:1-2 continues right on.]