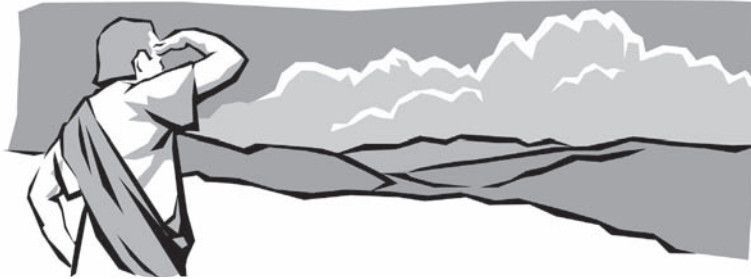


## A Promise to Suffering People (2 Thessalonians 1:1–12)



### SABBATH—SEPTEMBER 8

**READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON:** 2 Thessalonians 1:1–12; John 1:18; Romans 2:5; Romans 12:19; Revelation 16:4–7; Revelation 20:1–6; John 14:1–3.

**MEMORY VERSE:** “Keeping this in mind, we never stop praying for you. Our God has chosen you. We pray that he will consider you worthy of his choice. We pray that by his power he will make every good thing you have planned come true. We pray that he will make perfect all that you have done by faith” (2 Thessalonians 1:11, NIV).

**KEY (IMPORTANT) THOUGHT:** The second coming of Jesus is the greatest goal of all Christian hope.

**IN PAUL'S TIME, SENDING AND RECEIVING MAIL WAS VERY SLOW.** So, a church that wanted to talk to Paul had to track him down to get a message to him. This was not always an easy thing to do. When the message finally reached Paul, the apostle (leader and teacher) would then give an answer. And a messenger would deliver the answer back to the church. This method might take months. In the meantime, false beliefs would have time to develop and spread.

This seems to have happened in Thessalonica, where new problems arose in the church. These problems may even have become worse because of the misunderstanding of what Paul wrote in the first letter. Second Thessalonians was Paul's second try to correct the situation.

Paul's words in this week's lesson come down to this truth: at the Second Coming, believers will be rescued by God's wonderful act in Christ. This week's verses also give more information about His return.

**SUNDAY—SEPTEMBER 9**

**FRESH GREETINGS  
(2 Thessalonians 1:1, 2)**

**What hope and promise is found even in such a simple greeting as the one in 2 Thessalonians 1:1, 2? How much study of God is in there? How can we learn to make these hopes and promises our own?**

Paul talks about grace<sup>1</sup> and peace. Are they related? Should God's grace and the promise of forgiveness in Jesus lead to peace in our lives? It is important to take time to think about the wonderful gift of salvation that God has given to us! And the grace it offers us, even though we are not worthy! There is no better way to experience the peace that God has promised us! We need to stop thinking about ourselves. Instead, we should think about Jesus and what we have been given in Him.

**Compare 1 Thessalonians 1:1 with 2 Thessalonians 1:1, 2. There is a small difference in the wording. How important is that difference?**

There is one difference between 1 and 2 Thessalonians. Paul changes from "in God the Father" (1 Thessalonians 1:1) to "in God our Father" (2 Thessalonians 1:1). This points to a closer relationship between God and His people. There are people

who feel close to Jesus, but they are still afraid of God the Father. Paul tells the Thessalonians that they can have as much faith in their relationship with the Father as they do with Jesus. In fact, Jesus came to this earth to show us how close the Father is to us.

**Read John 1:18 and John 14:7–11. What assurance (guarantee) and hope can we get from these verses as we keep 2 Thessalonians 1:1, 2 in mind?**



**Jesus came to this earth to show us the Father.**

**MONDAY—SEPTEMBER 10**

**PAUL'S THANKSGIVING  
(2 Thessalonians 1:3, 4)**

Paul liked to write extra-long sentences. Second Thessalonians 1:3–10 is one sentence, and it is mostly about the second coming of Jesus. But the important part of the sentence is not about the Second Coming (2 Thessalonians 1:3, author's translation):

1. grace—God's gift of mercy that He gives us to take away our sins.

## Lesson 11 A PROMISE TO SUFFERING PEOPLE (2 THESSALONIANS 1:1–12)

“At all times we need to give thanks to God about you.”—Adapted. Paul’s comments about the return of Jesus (2 Thessalonians 1:6–10) are part of the reason that he thanks God for the Thessalonians themselves.

**Read 2 Thessalonians 1:3, 4. What important spiritual principle (rule) do we find in these verses about the question of faith? What happens to faith if it does not grow?**

*Thank* is the main verb that Paul uses in 2 Thessalonians 1:3–10 when he says that “we should always thank God” (NirV). Paul also feels the need to thank God for the Thessalonians because their faith is getting stronger and stronger. Meanwhile, the Thessalonians’ love for one another is also growing. This means that their growth in faith and love is continuing. This kind of growth is important for any healthy church. If a plant does not grow, it will die. If a church does not grow spiritually, it also will die.

Paul writes some important criticism of the church in the second and third chapters of this letter. But he knows that people need a lot of support and encouragement before they can accept criticism positively. Paul gives that kind of support and encouragement in the first chapter.

One of the reasons for Paul’s encouragement is that the church in Thessalonica is continuing to suffer attacks from the outside. Paul praises the Thessalonians’ “patience” in suffering. Instead of their faith, hope, and love, Paul talks about their faith, love,

and patience. Paul knows that believers in the church of Thessalonians will suffer much. So, he spends some time describing the Second Coming later on in the chapter.

The Thessalonians soon show courage in facing suffering. As a result, their faith and love grow stronger. So, for this reason, the apostles proudly have boasted about the Thessalonians’ courage. The Thessalonians also have become a good example of Christian faithfulness under fire.

**How can trouble and suffering increase our faith? At the same time, who has not struggled to keep his or her faith strong when facing troubles?**



Like a plant, if the church does not grow spiritually, it will die.

### TUESDAY—SEPTEMBER 11

#### SUFFERING AS A SIGN OF THE END (2 Thessalonians 1:5, 6)

**Read 2 Thessalonians 1:5, 6. What is Paul saying? What promises are found in these verses?**

## Lesson 11 A PROMISE TO SUFFERING PEOPLE (2 THESSALONIANS 1:1–12)

The word *evidence* (NIV) or *token* (KJV) means “proof.” What do the attacks against Christians (verse 4) prove? They are not evidence (proof) of God’s judgment against His people. Instead, they point to the future judgment. In the future the people of God are cleared of wrongdoing. And those who attacked the believers receive the same kind of punishment they gave to the ones they attacked.

There is a message here for us. Violence (attack) leads to more violence. And those who use violence against others have reason to fear the future. God’s judgment sets (puts) things right. Those who attack the people of God will one day face punishment from God. But those who suffer attacks from outside the church because of their faith today can look forward with hope to God’s future judgment. On that day, it will be very clear to all that they were in God’s favor.

The New Testament encourages believers to show grace, mercy, and forgiveness toward others. But when believers are attacked with curses, blows, and the threat of prison, it is encouraging to know that injustice will not continue forever. So, the saints of God are invited to have patience. (Read also Revelation 14:12.)

In 2 Thessalonians 1:5, 6, Paul reminds the suffering Thessalonians that God’s righteous (holy) judgment in the future will show that God has approved of them. More than this, their patience and faith in the face of trial gives proof that God has chosen them. In this way Christian suf-

fering can be a reason for rejoicing (1 Thessalonians 1:6, 7). It is real-life proof of whose side we will be on when Jesus comes.

Verse 5 shows the righteous judgment of God that will occur when He accepts the suffering of the Thessalonians. Verse 6 shows that judgment has taken place when the attackers are destroyed. In both cases the judgment is the end-time result of how we act as Christians now.

**Have you been unfairly treated by people who did not seem to be punished for their actions? If so, what comfort can you take in the promises of God’s judgment? Or look at it this way: have you treated people badly, unfairly, and gotten away with it (at least so far)? If so, how do you look upon the promises of God’s end-time judgment?**



**We can rejoice in suffering because it is proof that God has chosen us.**

**WEDNESDAY—SEPTEMBER 12**

**FIRE AND DESTRUCTION  
(2 Thessalonians 1:7–9)**

## Lesson 11 A PROMISE TO SUFFERING PEOPLE (2 THESSALONIANS 1:1–12)

**Read 2 Thessalonians 1:7–9. What is the most important reason for the wicked to be destroyed at the time of Jesus’ second coming? How are we to understand these verses when God is loving and forgiving?**

Many people are not comfortable with the language of these verses. They feel that “vengeance” (getting even) (NIV) and punishment are unworthy of a God of love, grace, and mercy. But just (fair) punishment is a theme that Paul often speaks about (Romans 2:5; Romans 12:19). Paul is clear: God’s justice will one day be made plain to all people.

And why not? Any good government in today’s world must at some time use force (police; military) in order to stop evil. Force is not always about using weapons. (For example, you are stopped for breaking a traffic law or audited [to have bank account examined] for your taxes.) But in some cases, when criminals use weapons, they must be stopped with weapons. Good governments have necessary controls so that we can all live together in peace. Many times evil will not give up voluntarily. The greater the power of evil, the greater the force needed to stop that evil.

The picture given in these verses is not pretty. But it tells us that God will do whatever it takes to stop rebellion (uprisings).

**Read Revelation 16:4–7 and Daniel 7:21, 22. How do these verses**

**teach what Paul wrote about in 2 Thessalonians?**

Through His own experience, Jesus understands the cost of suffering. He can be trusted to give justice that is always fair. God’s justice will cause suffering, but not more than is necessary. If we can trust God in anything, we can trust that His justice will show a wisdom and fairness that we cannot understand.

The goal of these verses is not to enjoy the punishment that the wicked must suffer but to encourage the people who suffer. The day of justice is coming. We do not need to punish others for their sins. Let God do this.

### THURSDAY—SEPTEMBER 13

#### **GIVING CHRIST GLORY (GREAT PRAISE AND HONOR) (2 Thessalonians 1:10–12)**

**Read 2 Thessalonians 1:10–12. What does it mean that Jesus Christ will be given glory by the actions of His saints?**

The full sentence in this week’s verses (2 Thessalonians 1:3–10) gives several important details about the second coming of Jesus. When Jesus returns, He will punish the wicked and give rest to the sufferers (read 2 Thessalonians 1:6, 7, ESV). Jesus will come down from heaven with a group of powerful angels (2 Thessalonians 1:7). He will come with flaming fire and give justice to those who have refused to accept



## Lesson 11 A PROMISE TO SUFFERING PEOPLE (2 THESSALONIANS 1:1–12)

God and the gospel of Jesus Christ (2 Thessalonians 1:8). The wicked are destroyed (2 Thessalonians 1:8, 9), while the righteous (saved) bring glory to Christ (2 Thessalonians 1:10).

The events of the Second Coming are the beginning of the thousand years that the saved will have with Christ in heaven. During that time, the earth will lie barren<sup>2</sup> (Revelation 20:1–6). First Thessalonians 4:16, 17 tells us that the saved join Jesus in the air at His return. John 14:1–3 also shows that Jesus will take the saints with Him to heaven.

**In 2 Thessalonians 1:11, how does Paul instruct believers to prepare for the second coming of Jesus?**

With verse 10, Paul is no longer talking about the wicked. He now turns again to the future of the saints at the Second Coming. In verses 10–12, the glory of Jesus is shown in the character (who people are) of those who believe in Him. Paul is glad to know that his prayers and efforts for the Thessalonians will be proven right at the return of Jesus (read 1 Thessalonians 2:19, 20).

Paul sets up his reasoning here for chapter 2. In chapter 2, Paul argues that the day of the Lord has not yet come. If it had, there would have been flaming fire, the wicked would have been destroyed, and the glorious (wonderful) return of Jesus would have been seen by all.

In today's verses, Paul switches

back and forth between the words *God* and *Jesus*. In this way, Paul shows that Jesus is God. This teaching is very important to us. When we see Jesus as greater than we did before, His gift of salvation means more to us. And the picture of Jesus as God becomes clearer to us too. This is especially true as we study His life, death, resurrection (return to life), and return. If Jesus is truly God, then the Father is just like (the same as) Him.

**How should we live our daily lives while expecting the Second Coming to take place soon? Why is it easy to get so caught up in daily living that we forget about His coming? How can we learn to remember this wonderful promise and give it close attention while we go about our daily business?**



**Jesus will come down from heaven with angels and flaming fire.**

<sup>2</sup>. barren—not producing; without life.

FRIDAY—SEPTEMBER 14

**ADDITIONAL STUDY:** “The Bible is written by men inspired<sup>3</sup> by God. But it is not God’s thought and language. It is man’s. God, as a writer, is not represented [shown]. . . . The writers of the Bible were God’s penmen, not His pen. . . .

“It is not the words of the Bible that are inspired. But the men were inspired. Inspiration<sup>4</sup> acts not on the man’s words or his explanations but on the man himself. Under the influence of the Holy Ghost, he is filled with thoughts. But the words receive the style of the individual mind. God’s mind is combined with the human mind. So the word of the man is the word of God.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 1, page 21.

“The instruction that Paul sent the Thessalonians in his first letter about the second coming of Christ followed Paul’s past teaching perfectly. But Paul’s words were misunderstood by some of the Thessalonian brothers. . . .

“In his second letter Paul tried to correct their misunderstanding of his teaching and show them his true position.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, page 264.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

❶ Does the truth of the Bible show itself more through deep word-by-word study or in the broad themes from wide reading? Or is there a time and place for both? Discuss the answer(s) in class.

❷ Read the Ellen G. White quote above about how inspiration works. How does this help us to understand the “human part” that appears at times in the Bible?

❸ Does the thought of the Second Coming frighten you? Or does it bring you hope? What does your answer say about your relationship with God or about your understanding of the gospel? Or both?

❹ The idea that trouble can make our faith and character stronger is true. But what do you say to people whose troubles are causing them to become bitter (upset by lost hope) and angry and to lose their faith?

**SUMMARY:** In the opening chapter of 2 Thessalonians, Paul shows his joy that the Thessalonian believers remain faithful even though they suffer much. He encourages them by telling them that things will change at the second coming of Jesus. He explains that whatever happens, we have the promise that God will punish the wicked.

3. inspired—led by the Holy Spirit.

4. inspiration—the process of writing God’s message with the Holy Spirit’s leading.