**2 Thessalonians Commentary**

**2 Thessalonians Chapter 1**

2Th 1:1

**“Silvanus.”** See commentary on 1 Thessalonians 1:1.

2Th 1:2

**“our.”** The word “our” is included in most Greek manuscripts but does not occur in some older manuscripts. This explains why some English versions read “our Father” and others read “the Father.”

2Th 1:3

**“brothers and sisters.”** The Greek text is “brothers,” but that often includes men and women.

[For more on brothers and sisters, see Word Study: “Adelphos.” For more on women’s involvement in the early church, see Appendix 11: “The Role of Women in the Church.”]

**“and rightly so.”** “Rightly” comes from the Greek word *axios* (#514 ἄξιος), and the Greek phrase could be rendered, “just as it is right,” which the REV nuances to “and rightly so” for better understanding in English. The point is that the behavior of the Thessalonians is worthy of, and deserving of, thanks to God. Paul was obligated to give thanks for the Thessalonians whether or not they were growing in the Faith, but they were growing, and so the thanks for them was certainly rightly given. The translation has to make it clear that the reason for giving thanks for the believers was not just because they were doing well in their walk with God.

**“is growing… is increasing.**” The verbs are in the present active tense. It is the durative present, showing continual action. Their trust is growing and continues to grow; their love is increasing and continues to increase. Kistemaker translates the latter as “constantly increasing.”[[1]](#footnote-28527)

2Th 1:4

**“boast.”** The word “boast” can have two connotations—just like English usage—one can boast in a negative way and in a positive way. Scripture uses both instances (e.g., James 4:16 and Rom. 15:17). This is the positive sense of boasting; Paul was proud of the Thessalonians in a godly way.

[See the commentary on 1 Thessalonians 2:19, “crown of boasting.”]

2Th 1:5

**“It is evidence of the righteous judgment of God that you will be counted worthy of the Kingdom of God.”** This phrase is translated differently in nearly every Bible version. The differences lie in the understanding of how the phrase “counted worthy” relates to the “judgment of God.” In the Greek, “counted worthy” is an *eis* with the articular infinitive construction: εἰς τὸ καταξιωθῆναι. Grammatically, this construction could be understood in three different ways:[[2]](#footnote-20533)

(1) To indicate *the purpose of God’s judgment*. E.g., “This is evidence of the righteous judgment of God, and is intended to make you worthy of the Kingdom of God” (NRSV; cf. NASB, NET). This view makes the sufferings of the Thessalonians part of God’s judgment, intended for the purpose of counting them worthy.

(2) To indicate *the result of God’s judgment*. E.g., “All this is evidence that God’s judgment is right, and as a result, you will be counted worthy of the Kingdom of God” (NIV; cf. ASV). On this view, the Thessalonians’ suffering could have been the judgment of God which resulted in their being counted worthy, or it could simply be that they suffered apart from God’s will and his having a judgment (i.e. legal opinion) of them resulted in their being considered worthy.

(3) The construction could also be used as *an elaboration of what God’s judgment is* (this is known as “epexegetical” usage.[[3]](#footnote-24821) E.g., “It is a clear evidence of God’s righteous judgment that you will be counted worthy of God’s kingdom” (HCSB). On this view the “being counted worthy” is simply an elaboration on what the “judgment of God” is. In other words, the judgment (i.e. legal opinion) of God is one that considers the Thessalonians worthy.

Like the CSB, the REV translation takes the third option. In this sense, the *eis* with the articular infinitive construction describes the result of God’s judgment, that the trust and faithfulness of the Thessalonians in the face of persecution is evidence that they “will be counted worthy of the Kingdom of God.” This judgment is said to be “righteous,” from *dikaios* (#1342 δίκαιος), meaning, right, correct, fair, and just. That God correctly judged the Thessalonians as righteous is demonstrated by the Thessalonians’ growing faith and love, and their steadfastness and faith even amidst persecutions. They would have been saved and thus righteous before God even if they had not stood faithful in persecutions, because Christian salvation is guaranteed. However, the fact that the Thessalonians did stand faithful in the midst of the persecution was evidence (*endeigma* [#1730 ἔνδειγμα]) that God’s saving them was righteous.

2Th 1:6

**“since.”** The Greek is *eiper* (#1512 εἴπερ), in what is known as a first class condition. The word is usually defined as “if,” however, there is no doubt being shed on the certainty of the condition, so “since” captures the meaning in this context.

**“it is righteous for God.”** This is the meaning of the phrase *para* (with/beside) *Theos* (God). From beside where God is, i.e., from His point of view, it is a righteous, or just thing to repay evildoers.[[4]](#footnote-10422)

2Th 1:7

**“as well as to us.”** The Greek text is literally, “with us,” meaning “along with” or “together with” us. Paul is saying that the relief that the Thessalonians will experience will also be experienced by Paul and his companions.

**“powerful angels.”** Genitive of character. Literally, “Angels of power,” meaning angels characterized by power.

2Th 1:8

**“in flaming fire.”** This is one of the places in the text where the verse is broken wrong. The phrase in flaming fire goes with the inflicting vengeance of 2 Thessalonians 1:8 and in fact, is in verse 8 in the Greek text, and so verse 8 should have started before “in flaming fire.”

**“taking vengeance.”** “Taking” is from the Greek verb *didōmi* (#1325 δίδωμι) and “vengeance” is from the noun *ekdikēsis* (#1557 ἐκδίκησις). The word *didomi* in its basic sense means “to give.” Hence, God is going to “deal out” retribution (NASB). The translation “taking” comes from a consideration of the context—it is judgment, punishment, and retribution that is being dealt out; thus, to deal out punishment or to “take vengeance” (cf. ESV, NRSV, NAB).

There are two types of justice administered in the Bible: corrective (or redemptive) justice, and retributive justice. *Corrective justice* deals out punishment in the hope of reforming the punished. For instance, the rod of correction drives foolishness from a child (Prov. 22:15)—the child’s punishment is a form of justice, but it is meant to restore the child to what is right. The delivering unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so the spirit may be saved, is another example of corrective justice (1 Cor. 5:5). *Retributive justice*, on the other hand, does not intend to reform the sinner at all, but is only meant as pure punishment so the offender gets what is deserved. Old Testament capital punishment exemplifies retributive justice; if a murderer is stoned to death, there is no chance for his or her reform; the only result is that justice is paid. Likewise, when the unrepentant are thrown into the Lake of Fire, retributive justice will have been meted out with no hope of future reform. While it may seem that retributive justice is not loving, it is just and fair, and God is just. Also, no individual is predestined to retributive justice; it is only given if it is deserved. God tells us ahead of time that the wicked will get what they deserve, so that people have the choice not to be wicked. If they ignore God’s warning, only then do they get the justice they deserve.

Here in 2 Thessalonians 1:8, it is clear from the context of “repaying” affliction (2 Thess. 1:6) that what is meant is justice in the sense of retribution or vengeance. Cf. also Romans 12:19: “Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, ‘Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord’” (ESV). In English, the word *vengeance* has the connotation of a just retaliation that is in proportion to the crime committed,[[5]](#footnote-22682) which highlights the justice of God. Only He is qualified to exact vengeance because only he can pay back in exact proportion what is truly deserved, leaving the scales of justice equal in the end.

2Th 1:9

**“everlasting destruction.”** The final destiny of the unsaved is “everlasting destruction,” just as this verse says. It is a common Christian belief that people “burn forever in hell,” but that is not what the Bible teaches. The Bible is clear that the wages of sin is death, and burning alive is not death. People who are unsaved and thrown into the Lake of Fire are eventually annihilated.

[For more on this, see Appendix 4: “Annihilation in the Lake of Fire.”]

**“presence.”** The Greek is literally “face,” but it refers to personal presence.

**“his glorious strength.”** This is likely the figure of speech antimereia, the exchanging of parts of speech.[[6]](#footnote-27953) In this case, the adjective “glorious” is put in the noun form “glory.” This is called by many grammarians an “attributed genitive” (cf. CSB “glorious strength”). An attributed genitive is where the head noun (“glory”) functions as an attributive adjective to the genitive noun (“of his strength”). Therefore, glory functions as an adjective to describe God’s strength—it is God’s “glorious strength.”[[7]](#footnote-15059) Another interpretive option is to view the phrase “of his strength” as descriptive of the Lord’s glory. They are cut off from the glory of the Lord, glory that is characterized by strength.

2Th 1:10

**“when he comes.”** The subjunctive mood of this verb is due to the particle *otan* (when, whenever). It is not expressing any doubt or uncertainty as to the actuality of the coming of the Lord, rather, it refers to uncertainty of the timing—*whenever* he may come.

The truth that a day was coming when God would come (by sending His Messiah) to judge the earth was well established in the Old Testament. Psalm 96:13 (HCSB) says of Yahweh, “for He is coming—for He is coming to judge the earth. He will judge the world with righteousness and the peoples with His faithfulness” (cf. Ps. 98:9). The prophetic books clearly revealed a “Day of Yahweh” when He judged the earth and its inhabitants (cf. Isa. 13:6-13; Joel 1:15, 2:1, 2; Amos 5:18-20; Obad. 1:15; Zeph. 1:14-18; Mal. 4:1-5).

**“be glorified.”** The passive Greek verb *endoxasthēnai* refers to Christian believers (“holy ones”) giving “glory” to Jesus at his return. To give “glory” comprises closely associated ideas like “honor” and “praise.” This is a different meaning than “glorified” in the sense of being resurrected or transformed like with Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration or the future destiny of believers who will be raised to new “glorified” bodies.

**“by...by.”** The Greek prepositions imply that Jesus will be with the believers, “among them,” and thus will be glorified by them when he is with them.

**“marveled at.”** The Greek is *thaumazō* (#2296 θαυμάζω). This word refers to both admiration and respect, as well as awe and wonder.[[8]](#footnote-31650) When Christ is seen by his believers, he will at once induce a profound awe within those present, who will feel great admiration and respect welling within them.

**“*this includes you*.”** Cf. NIV. The NIV captures the heart of what is meant by the parenthesis: “This includes you, because you believed our testimony to you.” Versions such as the ESV and others are wrong because they translate the *hoti* clause as if it causally affected the rest of the verse: e.g., “…when he comes on that day to be glorified in his saints…because our testimony to you was believed” (ESV). This makes it sound as though the Thessalonians’ belief *causes* the Lord to come on that day—which is obviously mistaken. Rather, the *hoti* clause is the figure of speech epitrechon, or parenthesis, meaning to include the Thessalonians among the believers who will marvel at the Lord. For information on the figure epitrechon see commentary on Romans 10:6.

2Th 1:11

**“will.”** See commentary on 1 Thessalonians 5:10; “will live.”

**“desire for goodness.”** Compare the NASB, HCSB, and NET translations: “desire for goodness.” Literally, the phrase reads, “desire of goodness.” The word *goodness* is in the genitive case; it is the objective genitive. That is to say, “goodness” is the object of *desire*. Paul prays God would fulfill the Thessalonians’ every desire *for* goodness. This genitive phrase likely also has a secondary meaning of “a desire that flows out of goodness” (a genitive of production), making this use of the genitive an amphibologia.

[See figure of speech “amphibologia.”]

2Th 1:12

**“will.”** Not “may.” See commentary on 1 Thessalonians 5:10, “will live”.

**“in you...in him.”** “In” means, in connection with; in union with. See commentary on Romans 6:3. Our relationship with Christ is a win-win situation when we walk in love and godly character. Jesus Christ is glorified by his association with us, and we are glorified by our association with him.

**“the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.”** Both God and Jesus give grace, and this phrase refers to both of them. That both Jesus and God are mentioned here has been disputed by some Trinitarians, but Gordon Fee, a Trinitarian, writes, “This [that both God and Jesus are in the verse] would hardly need further comment, except for the note in the TNIV: ‘Or [the grace of] of God and Lord, Jesus Christ.’ Although this note renders what is a grammatical *possibility*, two matters stand strongly against it as a *probability*. First, despite how some would read this passage, as well as Romans 9:5 and Titus 2:13, there is simply no incontrovertible evidence *(a)* that Paul ever used *theos* to refer to Christ—rather, it is the word he used exclusively to refer to the Father—and *(b)* that Paul ever used *kyrios* to refer to the Father, since this divine name is reserved exclusively for Christ. The definitive moment for these distinctions in Paul occurs in his next letter, in 1 Corinthians 8:6, where *theos* of the *Shema* is applied to God the Father and the *kyrios* to Christ the Son. Second, this doubling of God and Christ is so thoroughgoing in these two letters that one would need especially strong evidence to think otherwise here, and such evidence is precisely what is lacking. So while my theological sensitivities would love to have it so, my exegetical sensitivities will not allow it—even as an alternative in this case.”[[9]](#footnote-27610) “*Theos*” means “God and “*kyrios*” means “Lord”).

**2 Thessalonians Chapter 2**

2Th 2:1

**“coming.”** The Greek word is *parousia* (#3952 παρουσία), and it means “coming” or “presence.” Here it refers to the Rapture of the Christian Church.

**“our gathering together to him.”** Christians are gathered together to Christ at an event known as the Rapture at which time we meet the Lord in the air (1 Thess. 4:17).

**“brothers and sisters.”** See Word Study: “Adelphos.”

2Th 2:2

**“quickly.”** i.e., do not hastily, precipitously swerve from your present beliefs regarding the coming of the Lord.[[10]](#footnote-21140) By extension from the idea of “quickly,” this word, *taxeōs* (#5030 ταχέως), could also mean *easily* (NIV, HCSB, NET, NJB).

**“*state of* mind.”** Kistemaker translates: “(normal state of) mind.”[[11]](#footnote-16685) The Greek reads, simply, “be not shaken from the mind (*nous* [#3563 νοῦς]).” This is the figure of speech metonymy, where *mind* is put in place of *beliefs*, or *one’s mindset*.[[12]](#footnote-11849)

[See figure of speech “metonymy.”]

**“a spirit.”** The natural reading of “spirit,” *pneuma* (#4151 πνεῦμα), in this verse is the same as in 1 Corinthians 14:12 and 1 John 4:1-3, where “spirit” refers by the figure of speech metonymy to an utterance produced by spirit, i.e., either to a prophecy or a spiritual utterance from someone who has a demon. The translation by F. F. Bruce is “spirit-inspired utterance.”[[13]](#footnote-20438) It is less likely, but the text is open to “spirit” also having the meaning of an apparition, the appearance of a spirit-being (cf. Gal. 1:8-9). The Greek word, “spirit,” is used in 1 Corinthians 14:12 and 14:32, and 1 John 4:1-3 to refer primarily to a prophecy. Thus Paul assures the believers in Thessalonica that no genuine prophetic word would indicate that the Day of the Lord had already arrived. See commentary on 1 Corinthians 14:12.

**“a letter allegedly from us.”** The Devil is the father of lies, and people influenced by demons and willing to lie have infiltrated the Church from its earliest days. We should not be so naïve as to think that no one would try to send a letter in the name of Paul or his companions to influence what the Thessalonians believed, because that kind of thing did happen. Furthermore, we should not be so naïve as to think that such people do not exist in the Church today, who knowingly pervert the truth. That is why Christians must be diligent students of the Bible, walk by the spirit, and look for the fruit in people’s lives to see what they are really like, just as the Lord taught us (Matt. 7:16-20).

**“that the Day of the Lord has come.”** The Day of the Lord in this context refers to the Great Tribulation, the terrible time on earth that is described in the book of Revelation, with seal judgments, trumpet judgments, thunder judgments, and bowl judgments. The phrase, “the Day of the Lord,” is one of the more common terms that refers to the End Times, and it can refer to the End Times as a whole, or it can refer to a specific part of the End Times, something that must be determined from the context. Here in 2 Thessalonians 2:2, the phrase “the Day of the Lord” refers to the period of Tribulation, which is why the Thessalonian believers would have been alarmed that they were starting to go through the Tribulation. The great persecution of Christians that would come during the reign of Nero had not started yet, but there was enough persecution that the believers in Thessalonica could have thought the Tribulation had started.

Christians will be Raptured off the earth before the wrath of God comes (1 Thess. 4:13-18; 2 Thess. 2:1-2). There is some uncertainty among Christians as to the timing of the Rapture, and whether Christians will experience any of the specific plagues described in Revelation, particularly any of the seals in Revelation 6. However, the weight of evidence supports that the Rapture will occur before any of the troubles in the book of Revelation occur. From Revelation 1:10 on, the book of Revelation is about the future. Christians are not subject to the wrath of God (Rom. 5:9; 1 Thess. 5:9), and the Rapture will occur before the tribulations described in the book of Revelation.

2 Thessalonians 2:1-2 are good evidence that Paul taught the Rapture would occur before “the Day of the Lord,” with its plagues and judgments. Only those who had been taught that there was a Rapture before the Tribulation would be “unsettled or alarmed” at the thought that the Day of the Lord had begun and they were still on earth. If Paul taught that the Rapture came before the Day of the Lord, and now the believers in Thessalonica were being taught by others that they were in the Day of the Lord, then they would be alarmed because that would have meant they were not saved and they had missed the Rapture, referred to as “our gathering together to him” in 2 Thessalonians 2:1.

In biblical times there was no mass communication, and it could be quite easy for a small community of believers to think the Rapture had occurred and they had missed it. If, on the other hand, Paul had not taught them about the Rapture (as if there was no Rapture), or taught that the Rapture was in the middle of the Day of the Lord or at the end of it, then if people taught them they were in the midst of the Day of the Lord that would not have been alarming. On the contrary, it would have been exciting because then they would know they were very close to Jesus’ return.

If Paul did not teach that there was a Rapture before the Day of the Lord, then he would have taught Christians to “stand fast and prepare for trouble” in the Day of the Lord, which is what Jesus taught Israel (Matt. 24; Mark 13; Luke 21). The fact that the Thessalonians were unsettled and alarmed at the teaching they were in the Day of the Lord indicates Paul taught a pre-Tribulation Rapture.

2 Thessalonians 2:5 shows that Paul had been teaching on the Rapture and what would happen after it when he was at Thessalonica. Furthermore, the fact that the Rapture is clearly in 1 Thessalonians, which was written shortly before 2 Thessalonians (likely 6 months at most) shows that Paul had spent considerable time in Thessalonica explaining the Christians’ hope and future.

The King James Version (1611) reads “Day of Christ,” but that reading is late; modern textual research shows conclusively that “Day of the Lord” is accurate, and that is the way the modern versions read.

[For more on the meaning of “the Day of the LORD” (also translated “the Day of Yahweh”) see commentary on Mal. 4:5. For more on the Old Testament prophecies that the Day of the Lord would be a harsh and deadly time, see commentary on Dan. 12:1.]

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2Th 2:3

**“the apostasy.”** The Greek word is *apostasia* (#646 ἀποστασία), and it refers to people’s changing their loyalty or allegiance; disobeying established authority. Thus it means an apostasy, a rebellion, a defection, a revolt. In the Septuagint, written about 250 BC, it became a technical term for a rebellion or apostasy (cf. Josh. 22:22; 2 Chron. 29:19; 33:19; Jer. 2:19.[[14]](#footnote-29045) The meaning “apostasy” or “rebellion” for *apostasia* is so universally attested in New Testament times that most lexicons only list meanings such as “rebellion” or “apostasy” for *apostasia*.[[15]](#footnote-11972)

*Apostasia* and its cognate forms and related words are used over 40 times in the Septuagint, and they are all used of a political or religious defection or rebellion. This becomes extremely significant when we remember that, especially for the Greek-speaking believers such as the ones in Thessalonica, their Old Testament was the Septuagint, not the Hebrew text. Thus, their exposure to *apostasia* was clearly in referral to an apostasy or rebellion, and so that is what they would have expected the word to mean in Paul’s letter to them unless the context clearly indicated something different, which it does not. There is another reason that the Thessalonian believers would have expected *apostasia* to have the same meaning in Paul’s letter to them that it had in the Septuagint. When Paul quoted the Old Testament in his epistles, the majority of the time he quoted the Septuagint, not the Hebrew text, and this established a continuity of thought between what God had said in the Old Testament and what He was saying in the New Testament. Furthermore, the only other use of *apostasia* in the New Testament is Acts 21:21, where it is used of a rebellion or apostasy.

Because *apostasia* is derived from the verb *aphistēmi* (#868 ἀφίστημι), which means “to depart,” some Christians assert that this verse is referring to the Rapture. It is also stated that since *apostasia* is preceded by the definite article, “the,” in the Greek, that it must be referring to the well-known departure, the Rapture. But it is a mistake to insist that the meaning of a noun (in this case *apostasia*) is basically the same as the verb (in this case *aphistēmi*) as some commentators have done.[[16]](#footnote-12562) As more and more secular Greek documents are unearthed by archaeologists and historians it is clear that it often occurs that nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs, even when from the same root, have very different meanings. This is especially the case when a certain inflection of a word takes on a special meaning, usually referred to by scholars as a “technical meaning,” and that is exactly what has happened with the noun *apostasia*, as Friberg states in his lexicon.

There has been much discussion on what “the apostasy” is that Paul is writing about. This “apostasy” is not about Christians leaving the Christian Faith. From Paul’s teaching and what Daniel says, this “apostasy” is what opens “the Day of the Lord,” the Great Tribulation, and is after the Rapture, so it cannot be about Christians because they will have been Raptured off the earth into heaven. This apostasy is about the Jews (including deceived Jewish believers) leaving God and His commands and turning to worldly ways to get the support they want. Specifically, it refers to the Jews making a covenant with the man who turns out to be the Antichrist (Dan. 9:26-27; and see commentary on Dan. 9:27).

The text gives us a couple of large hints as to what the apostasy is. From the scope of Scripture, we learn that it cannot be a Christian apostasy because Christians will have been Raptured to heaven. From Thessalonians, we learn that the Day of the Lord will not come until the apostasy and the “man of sin” is revealed (the “man of sin” is often also referred to as the Antichrist). Also, the book of Daniel shows that the Antichrist will be revealed when many in Israel, including the leaders, make a covenant with him, and indeed, Israel turning from God and making a covenant with the Antichrist is “the apostasy” that 2 Thessalonians 2:3 is referring to. So when Israel makes a covenant with the Antichrist, that is both the apostasy referred to in 2 Thessalonians and the thing that reveals the Antichrist, and those things will occur after the Rapture and they will start the seven years of the Tribulation. Also, the reason that Paul refers to the apostasy as “the *apostasia*,” “the apostasy,” is that it is a reference to the apostasy that is revealed in Daniel.

Understanding that the “apostasy” is Israel turning from God also fits with what Jesus said in Matthew 24:10 about many people falling away and handing others over to the authorities (cf. Mark 13:9, 12-13; Luke 21:12, 16-17). Jesus was not speaking about Christians, there were not any Christians on earth when Jesus taught, he was referring to Jews who would abandon the truth.

After speaking of “the apostasy” in 2 Thessalonians 2:3, Paul then goes into a very long discussion about it through verse 12 (2 Thess. 2:3-12), and he gives details that are not in the Old Testament or Gospels. The Man of Sin will come, powered by Satan and doing Satan’s work. There will be all kinds of lying signs, miracles, and wonders, and many people will be deceived. Also, this “man of sin” will not be atheist or agnostic. Quite the opposite. He will be a religious person, but will lead people away from the true God, true worship, and even truth itself (Dan. 8:12; 2 Tim. 4:4). Thus he will continue his trajectory of leading people into great apostasy. This should not be surprising because Satan has effectively used false religion to turn people from God and truth for millennia. So verse 3 speaks of the apostasy, and the following 9 verses enlarge upon some of what is involved with that apostasy.

Some of the early English versions such as Tyndale (1526), Coverdale (1535), Beza (1565), and the Geneva Bible (1599) translated *apostasia* as “departure,” and these are sometimes used to support the idea that this verse is speaking about the Rapture. However, there are some things we must keep in mind about those early English translations. First, “departure” does not necessarily mean “Rapture.” A “departure” can refer to an apostasy and rebellion. Second, those early English translations were made from the Greek before the Greek papyri were discovered by archaeologists, so the proper meaning of many New Testament words was not known (this in part explains why the modern versions differ from the older ones in so many verses). Also, the early versions were made during a time when Greek lexicons and even Greek lexical studies were almost nonexistent. Furthermore, Greek studies in the Septuagint had hardly begun, and there was nothing in English or Greek that could be considered a decent concordance (and there would not be one for many years to come). So to insist that the early translations referred to a “Rapture” in 2 Thessalonians 2:3 as if they had a truth that has now generally been lost is simply not true.

Another important reason for believing the word *apostasia* refers to a rebellion or apostasy is the context itself. Paul had already taught the Thessalonians that there was going to be a Rapture (1 Thess. 4:13-17), and from the scope of Scripture and this section in 2 Thessalonians 2:1-3, we see that the Rapture would precede the wrath that will come upon the world during the Day of the Lord. Thus the only way that the Thessalonian believers could be in the Day of the Lord, as some false teachers were saying, would have been if they missed the Rapture (or Paul had been wrong in his teaching). So it would not have helped the situation for Paul to say the Rapture would come before the Day of the Lord, because they knew that already and apparently were confused about it and whether they had missed it. Instead, Paul is showing them that the Day of the Lord and its wrath had not come because the well-known apostasy had not yet come and the Man of Sin had not yet been revealed. That being the case, it is clear the Rapture had not happened yet.

**“the man of lawlessness is revealed.”** The “man of lawlessness” is the person Christians generally know as “the Antichrist,” an archenemy of God. There are many antichrists, that is, people who are against God, but there will only be one Antichrist, and he will be empowered by the Devil (2 Thess. 2:9) and will oppose all godliness and the people of God. During the Tribulation period preceding the Battle of Armageddon, the Antichrist will be revealed.

**“lawlessness.”** To better understand the End Times the reader must properly understand what “lawlessness” is. People generally think that laws are good, and so “lawlessness” is either like America’s “Wild West” when there was no law, or else lawlessness is when there are laws but they are not enforced so people do whatever they want. However, that is not primarily what “lawlessness” means in this context. Although there will be plenty of civil disobedience in the End Times, civil disobedience has always been a problem. The End Times will be characterized by a greater and more pervasive “lawlessness” than just civil disobedience.

God has laws, but when the leaders, judges, and others in charge of society make laws that defy and contradict God’s laws, and also refuse to enforce godly laws, they are “lawless” and the whole society becomes lawless. The people may be obeying the laws set up by the society, but in doing so they are defying God and thus are “lawless” in God’s eyes. For example, Israel was “lawless” when the leaders openly practiced and condoned idolatry. Similarly, societies today are lawless when the leaders and people legally and openly participate in practices that go against God’s laws. For example, it is legal to get drunk, and getting drunk is actually popular now. People boast about it and write songs about it, but it is against God’s law and the society that condones it is lawless. The same is true concerning many things done in society today; they are legal and openly practiced but are against God’s laws.

In Isaiah’s time, the leaders and the people put laws and practices in place that defied God’s law, and so Isaiah prophesied, “Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness” (Isa. 5:20). That same “woe” applies to people today: people who break God’s laws may be lauded in modern society, but they will not do well on the Day of Judgment when God will judge people according to His laws and standards. The Antichrist is called “the man of lawlessness” because he will establish and follow laws that brazenly contradict God’s laws, so much so that in the End Times people who believe God will be horribly persecuted. The persecution of Christians is already occurring—usually with the support of “laws” established by ungodly people—but the Antichrist will take lawlessness to a worldwide level, often by enacting and enforcing laws that defy and contradict God’s laws.

It should be pointed out that some English versions say “man of sin” instead of “man of lawlessness.” There are Greek manuscripts that have the word for “sin,” *harmartia* (#266 ἁμαρτία), and thus read “man of sin,” and there are manuscripts that have the word for “lawlessness,” *anomia* (#458 ἀνομία), and thus read “man of lawlessness.” Modern scholars generally agree that the earlier and better Greek manuscripts read “lawlessness,” and so “lawlessness” is in most modern versions. “Lawlessness” also seems to fit better with the scope of Scripture, because although the End Times will certainly have an abundance of sin, Jesus taught that “lawlessness” would be a dominant characteristic of that time (Matt. 13:41; 24:12; cf. Matt. 7:23).

**“the son of destruction.”** An idiom for someone doomed to destruction (cf. John 17:12 of Judas).

2Th 2:4

**“exalts himself above everything called ‘God.’”** The “man of lawlessness,” commonly known as the “Antichrist,” will exalt himself above every god and authority, including the true God. Although many versions have the term “so-called God,” that is not what the Greek text says, and the meaning of the text is more inclusive than that. It is not just that the Antichrist exalts himself above the false gods, he exalts himself above the true God as well.

**“the sanctuary of God.”** This is one of the clear verses that let us know that during the years of the Tribulation that occur before the battle of Armageddon, there will be a Temple in Jerusalem. That temple is not yet built, but will be at some future point. That future temple is also mentioned in verses such as Revelation 11:1-2.

**“displaying himself—that he is God​.”** The word for “God” in the Greek, *theos* (#2316 θεός), lacks the definite article and so could either be “God” or “a god” (cf. “claiming that he is a god,” 2 Thess. 2:4 NAB). The fact that there is no definite article does not demand the translation “a god,” for there are clear instances where the word lacks the article and yet refers to the true God (e.g., 2 Cor. 5:19; 1 Thess. 2:5). As Lenski points out, grammatically the word is functioning as a predicate, which is why the article is lacking here.

The Antichrist is not showing himself off as “a god,” as if he or his followers thought there were lots of gods, like the Romans did. There is no evidence the Antichrist is a polytheist. In fact, he will claim to represent the true God. Here in Thessalonians we see that the antichrist displays himself like God does, sitting himself in the *naos* (#3485 ναός), the holy of holies or inner sanctuary, which both early Christians and Jews would have understood to mean he was claiming for himself the honor and authority of God.[[17]](#footnote-19954)

It is important, however, that we do not read 2 Thessalonians 2:4 to be saying that the Antichrist, the “man of sin,” thinks he is the Creator, the True God. That is not what he is doing. He is not replacing the True God, in fact he thinks he is the representative of the true God on earth, just as Jesus was. So he is claiming to be like the True God to the people and thus God to them. Lenski explains this: “This Antichrist reveals himself as the Antichrist by this pagan act of seating himself in the true God’s own sanctuary. He does not deny the true God, he is neither an atheist nor agnostic…He sits in God’s own place as if he, too, were God and shows and exhibits himself to all Christendom with the claim “that he is God,” that no less than deity belongs also to him…The great apostasy accepts this claim and honors this Antichrist with divine honor.”[[18]](#footnote-15052)

2Th 2:5

**“Do you not remember…?”** The question posed in this verse is the figure of speech erotesis, a rhetorical question.[[19]](#footnote-14325) It is also a parenthesis with the continuation of thought about the man of Lawlessness flowing from 2 Thess. 2:4, picked back up in 2 Thess. 2:6.

**“I told you these things​.”** In the Greek text, “told you” is in the imperfect tense of the verb “to speak,” *legō* (#3004 λέγω). The imperfect tense highlights that Paul told them many times, that is, that it was a continual or habitual practice of Paul’s while he was still with the Thessalonians. Bible preachers and teachers should take note of this: it is never enough to teach the great truths of the faith once; we must teach them over and over again, so they can sink deep into people’s hearts.

2Th 2:6

**“holding *him* back now.”** The Greek word for “now,” *nun* (#3568 νῦν), goes with “now holding back” (e.g., HCSB, ESV, NASB) not “now know” (e.g., NIV, NAB).[[20]](#footnote-28894) One of the reasons is the juxtaposition between the Antichrist “now” being held back but “will be” revealed.

**“so that he will be revealed.”** The Greek construction εις το + infinitive often communicates purpose, as it does here.

**“when his time comes.”** This is an idiomatic translation of the Greek ἐν τῷ ἑαυτοῦ καιρῶ, literally, “in his own proper time.” This is a difficult phrase to translate, not because of its meaning, but because there are many possible English translations, each with its own set of possible misunderstandings. The meaning of the Greek is clear, that there is a proper or right time (*kairos*, #2540 καιρός) for the man of Lawlessness to be revealed. But how to bring this into English and avoid misunderstandings? The translation, “in his time” (KJV, ESV, NASB) misses the important aspect of *kairos*, that the time is particularly suited for his revelation, it is the *proper* time. But to say he will be revealed at his “appointed time” (NJB) gives the sense there is a fixed date for the revealing, which is not what the Greek conveys by using *kairos*. *Kairos* is only indicating that the revealing will be at the right and proper time; this in of itself does not mean God has set an appointed date for the eschaton. Neither should we look to the translation “in his own time” (NET), for to English readers this makes it sound like it is the antichrist’s choice of when he will be revealed, and he will do it “in his own time.” A translation that captures the sense of the Greek well for the English reader is, “he will be revealed when his time comes.” This puts the control of the revelation in God’s hands and yet recognizes that there is a proper time for him to be revealed.

2Th 2:7

**“secret *power* of lawlessness.”** The REV translates the Greek word *mustērion* (#3466 μυστήριον) as “sacred secret” almost everywhere it occurs because *mustērion* was used to refer to a secret that was in the sacred or religious sphere. A secret in the secular realm was referred to by the Greek word *kruptos* (from which we get the English word “crypt”). Furthermore, *mustērion* does not mean “mystery,” that is, something incomprehensible, something that cannot be understood. Instead, *mustērion* means “secret,” something that some people know but others do not.

[For more information on *mustērion* and the translation, “sacred secret,” see commentary on Eph. 3:9.]

There are many “sacred secrets” in Scripture. For example, Paul uses the plural of *mustērion* (#3466 μυστήριον) and refers to “sacred secrets” in 1 Corinthians 4:1: “regard us as… stewards of the sacred secrets of God.” (1 Cor. 13:2 has another usage in the plural). Other sacred secrets spoken of in the New Testament include: the sacred secrets of the Kingdom of Heaven/God (Matt. 13:11; Mark 4:11; Luke 8:10; ); of Israel’s partial hardening (Rom. 11:25); the content of speaking in tongues (1 Cor. 14:2); of new, transformed bodies at the return of Christ (1 Cor. 15:51); of Christ’s relationship to the church (Eph. 5:32); the sacred secret of lawlessness (2 Thess. 2:7); and of godliness (1 Tim. 3:16); as well as several “sacred secrets” in the book of Revelation (Rev. 1:20; 10:7; 17:5; 17:7). A major “sacred secret” in Acts and the Epistles is the dispensation, or “Administration” of Grace, called “the Administration of the grace of God” (Eph. 3:2), which is also referred to as the “Administration of the Sacred Secret” (Eph. 3:9).

The REV could have translated 2 Thessalonians 2:7 as “the sacred secret of lawlessness,” but although it would have been grammatically accurate, it would have given the wrong impression to the average English reader. We are not used to something that is “sacred” being evil or of the Devil, even though in Greek usage *mustērion* can mean that. It would be incongruous in common English to refer to how the Devil is bringing forth lawlessness on earth as “the sacred secret of lawlessness.” That is because we typically use the word “sacred” to refer only to godly sacred things, not ungodly sacred things. However, looking in a dictionary shows that the word “sacred” refers to things set apart for the worship of any god or deity, and it also relates to things in the religious sphere in general in contrast to the secular or profane sphere. Thus actually, the Greek and English use “sacred” in much the same way. Understood that way, it is revealing to know that both God and the Devil have “sacred secrets,” and they reveal those secrets as the time and circumstances suit them. In this case, behind the scenes, unknown and unseen, the Devil is working his sacred secret of lawlessness, and certainly part of the fruit of that lawlessness is the general lawlessness, including the persecution of Christians, that we see on earth. Nevertheless, for the clarity of the English translation, the REV has “the secret power of lawlessness,” which is clear in English (cf. NIV).

**“is already at work.”** This phrase shows us that the lawlessness that Paul is referring to is not just ordinary evil, because that had always been at work. Since the Day of Pentecost, God’s people had been in “the last days,” and there is a special depth of evil that has been working behind the scenes to disrupt the plans of God since that time.

**“the one.”** The Greek text allows for the force that is doing the holding back to be either impersonal or personal. If impersonal, it could be the Church, the government, the presence of holy spirit in Christians, etc. If personal, and translated as “he,” then it more specifically refers to someone such as Satan, God, Jesus Christ, or the Emperor as wielding the power of government.

But it is unlikely that Satan would hold back evil and he is not going to be taken out of the way. Indeed, in the last days his power will increase. Similarly, God will not be taken out of the way either. He will continue to act powerfully on behalf of people as He always does. Also, although many Church Fathers thought that “the one” restraining evil was the Roman government (and some modern commentators still feel that this verse is referring to the government), human government cannot hold back the power of Satan, and government will not be “taken out of the way” of evil. There will still be government during the Tribulation but it will be taken over and controlled by the forces of evil with all their lying signs and wonders (2 Thess. 2:9).

**“holding it back.”** The Greek is ambiguous, and simply says, “holding back,” or “restraining.” Many versions supply either *it* (e.g., ESV) or *him* (e.g., NET), thus dictating for the English reader what is being held back. If we say, “holding *it* back,” the “it” is impersonal and must refer to the sacred secret of lawlessness. If we say, “holding *him* back,” then “he” must be the man of lawlessness. However, the Greek does not specify what is being held back, it simply reads, “the one holding back.” The REV follows many versions in having “it,” i.e., the lawlessness, but we must allow that the text may refer to “him,” and also that it might have intentionally been left ambiguous because both “he” and “it” are being held back.

**“is out of the way.”** The Greek more literally reads, “until he comes out from the midst.” Thayer’s lexicon addresses this in his definition of *mesos* (#3319 μέσος), translated “midst,” and writes, “out of the way, out of sight… γίνομαι ἐκ μέσου, to be taken out of the way, to disappear.”

2Th 2:8

**“lawless one.”** This is one of the names of the man commonly known among conservative Christians as “the Antichrist.” When he is tracked through the Word of God we can see why he is called “lawless,” and it is because he breaks God’s laws (see commentary on Matt. 24:12).

**“destroy.”** The Greek word is *anaireō* (#337 ἀναιρέω), and it means “do away with, destroy, kill, slay, overthrow, make an end of, etc.” depending on the context. In this context, the REV has “destroy” because Jesus Christ will “destroy” the Antichrist, first by defeating him in battle and throwing him into the Lake of Fire where he will eventually be annihilated, and also by dismantling his ungodly earthy control and replacing it with his own universal rule. The verb ἀναιρέω is not the common verb for “destroy,” but it is a good translation in this context. *The Source New Testament* has “do away with,” which is also very good. “Kill” would be okay as a translation as long as the reader understood that the Antichrist would not be immediately killed, but would be finally killed many years in the future.

2 Thessalonians 2:8 has a textual variant, and some texts, including the ones the Kings James Version was translated from, have *analiskō* (#355 ἀναλίσκω) “consume,” but there is good textual evidence that *anaireō* (“destroy”) is correct and that the verb was changed by scribes to *analiskō* likely because being “consumed” seemed to fit better with the idea of Jesus’ mouth.

[For more on the Antichrist, called the “beast” in Revelation, being defeated and thrown into the Lake of Fire, see Rev. 19:19-21. For more on annihilation in the Lake of Fire, see Appendix 4: “Annihilation in the Lake of Fire.”]

**“the spirit from his mouth.”** The word for “spirit” is *pneuma* (#4151 πνεῦμα). We retained the reading “spirit of his mouth” rather than “breath of his mouth,” feeling the former captured the phrase’s meaning more fully, and better exemplified the spirit power of the mouth. Scripture often uses the word “spirit” to refer to spiritual utterances, especially prophecy (See commentary on 1 Cor. 14:12). Such is the case here; Christ pronounces destruction by the breath of his mouth. This is portrayed as a sword coming out of Christ’s mouth in Revelation 1:16; 2:16; 19:15, 21. Isaiah 11:4 foretold that the Messiah would destroy the wicked with the spiritual utterance from his mouth. It says, “He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth; with the spirit from his lips he will slay the wicked.”

**“put an end *to him*.”** The verb for “put an end to him” is *katargeō* (#2673 καταργέω), which has two primary definitions: (1) to render ineffective or powerless, and (2) to destroy or abolish. By the appearance of his coming, Christ will simultaneously *destroy* the lawless one by the prophetic utterance from his mouth and *render unproductive* all of his works on earth. The translation “put an end to him” more or less captures both senses. And because Paul already mentions the lawless one will be killed (seen both in this word, *katargeō*, and the word for “kill,” *anaireō*), the “rendering powerless” aspect refers to any residue of influence left after the death of the lawless one—his entire system of error is brought to nothing. Hence, Christ will “put an end to him” (cf. C. Williams’ translation: “put a stop to his operations”).

**“appearance.”** The word for appearance is *epiphaneia* (#2015 ἐπιφάνεια), from which we get our modern word “epiphany,” meaning, “a sudden manifestation or perception of the essential nature or meaning of something.” In Greek, the word’s base meaning is to make visible, to shine light upon, hence, to appear. *Epiphaneia* has connotations of brightness and splendor, which is brought out by several different translations (e.g., KJV: “the brightness of his coming;” see also: NIV, HCSB, NJB).

2Th 2:9

**“is.”** The “is” is in the present tense; it is the prophetic present, speaking of *future* events in the present tense.[[21]](#footnote-20162) Wallace’s grammar refers to this as the *futuristic present*.[[22]](#footnote-22954) The coming of the lawless one is a future event, yet Paul speaks of what his coming “is” in accord with, rather than what it “will” be in accord with. Writing in the prophetic present highlights the certainty and inevitability of the lawless one’s coming.[[23]](#footnote-24735) For more information, see the commentary on Luke 3:9).

**“is a result of the activity of.”** The Devil gives the Antichrist his power. This fact is alluded to in prophecy in Daniel 8:24, but it is not as clearly stated there as it is here. Then it is stated much more clearly here in 2 Thessalonians 2:9, then in Revelation 13:2 it is stated again. The Greek simply has the preposition *kata*, but *kata* has so many different meanings in this context that it needs to be expanded to get close to what it meant to anyone reading it in the first century. Note some of the many different ways it is translated in English versions: “whose coming is marked by the working of Satan” (BBE, NJB); “it will happen through Satan’s efforts” (CEB; cf. CJB, ESV, NAB, NET); “the man of sin will come with the power of Satan” (GW); “whose coming is in accord with the activity of Satan” (NASB, NIV); “this man will come to do the work of Satan” (NLT). It is clear that the Greek preposition *kata* has at least two meanings in this verse; that the man of sin will come due to, and empowered by, Satan, and also that the works that he will do will be “in accord with” Satan, i.e., the kinds of things that Satan himself has done throughout history.

**“the Adversary.”** The Greek word for Adversary is *Satanas* (#4567 Σατανᾶς), which has been transliterated as “Satan” in most versions. This causes the meaning of the word, which is important, to be lost. For more information on it, see the commentary on Mark 1:13.

[For more information on the names of the Devil, see Appendix 8: “Names of the Devil.”]

**“all kinds of power and counterfeit signs and wonders​.”** The Devil always has had a lot of power to make physical things happen on earth. He is certainly behind many natural disasters such as hurricanes and tornados. After all, he is the “ruler of the authority of the air” (Eph. 2:2) and the “ruler of this world” (John 12:31). People who follow him, such as witches and sorcerers, even if they don’t follow him as the Devil but as a god or deity or as an impersonal force that can be tapped into, can wield a large amount of spiritual power. The Devil is always the ultimate source behind evil, which is why Paul wrote: “For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the world-rulers of this *present* darkness, against the spiritual *forces* of evil in the heavenly *places*” (Eph. 6:12).

There have been many times and places, especially before cameras and video equipment, when the Devil openly displayed his power. We see that in verses such as Exodus 7:11 when the sorcerers of Egypt turned their staffs into snakes by magic power (see commentary on Exod. 7:11). The Devil loves to remain hidden, so in our modern times we do not see as many open displays of demonic power as history reports, but in the End Times, when the Devil and God are in open war and the Antichrist is taking control of the earth and the minds and hearts of the people, we will once again see open displays of demonic power: there will be all kinds of displays of power, and signs and lying wonders, as this verse says.

The word “wonder” in the phrase “lying wonders” is *teras* (#5059 τέρας), and it means something that astounds us; causes us to wonder or marvel; causes us to watch it. This would usually be a miracle or something very unusual. But a “lying wonder” is something that catches our attention but lies to us, points us in the wrong direction. When Jesus raised Lazarus, it was a miracle, sign, and wonder, but it pointed to the power of God. A lying wonder will point to the Devil or support him in some way.

2Th 2:10

**“deception for those.”** An alternate translation would be: “every kind of unrighteous deception *that deceives those* who are destroying themselves,” or “that reaches those.” The Greek is simply the article (“those”) in the dative case, indicating that the action of deception reaches and affects those who are destroying themselves.

**“destroying themselves.”** The verb *apollumi* (#622 ἀπόλλυμι), “destroy,” can be middle or passive voice, and we believe that the middle voice fits best here. The middle voice means that the action of the verb comes back onto the subject itself. These people are not just “perishing” (which would be passive); rather, they play a role in bringing their destruction upon themselves. They are literally destroying themselves. Rotherham’s Emphasized Bible has, “And with all manner of deceit of unrighteousness, in them who are destroying themselves, because, the love of the truth, they did not welcome, that they might be saved.”

**“love the truth.”** The Greek text has a genitive construction and is more literally, “they did not receive the love of the truth.” This is amphibological, that is, it contains the figure of speech amphibologia, or multiple meanings.[[24]](#footnote-13263) The genitive could be read as a genitive of relation (“love relating to the truth”), origin (“love that comes from the truth”), attributive genitive (“the true love”), or objective genitive (“they did not love the truth”). The objective genitive seems to best fit the context, but the fact is that these evil people did not accept any of these possible relationships between love and truth. When Paul writes that people “did not receive the love of the truth” he means they did not accept the Good News about Jesus Christ.

[See figure of speech “amphibologia.”]

**“and so be saved.”** In the Greek, this phrase is a result clause: the *eis to* with an infinitive construction.[[25]](#footnote-16528) These unbelievers refused the love of the truth, and by extension *refused its result*, the result that they may be saved. This result clause parallels the same expression of result in the next verse: see commentary on 2 Thessalonians 2:11, “so.”

2Th 2:11

**“sends.”** There is a lot in the verb “send,” which is the Greek *pempō* (#3992 πέμπω). First, it is in the present tense, even though the sending is still a future event. This is the prophetic present (see commentary on 2 Thess. 2:9, “is”). The reason for the present tense is that it makes a stronger impression than just “will send,” and the second reason, one that is very important today, 2,000 years after Paul wrote, is that the influence is not just for after the Rapture, but can easily be present in the End Times before the Rapture. Putting the verb in the present tense opens the door for the deluding influence of the Adversary to start at any time.

Second, the verb “send” is being used as the idiom of permission. God set up in the beginning that sin had consequences, and when people sin God’s justice requires that He cannot effectively protect them from the Adversary. God “sends” the deluding influence, which might even be a demon, only in the sense that when people sin and refuse to repent they open themselves up to attacks of the Devil and being blinded and influenced by him.

[For more on the idiom of permission, see commentary on Rom. 9:18.]

**“deluding influence.”** Cf. NET, NASB, NAB, NJB. In Greek the phrase literally reads, he sends “a working of error” or “a working of deception.” God does not send the lie itself, but the “working” or “power,” from *energeia* (#1753 ἐνέργεια). This power is described by the noun *planē* (#4106 πλάνη) in the genitive case. *Planē* is an “error” or “deception,” thus God sends a power that is characterized by delusion, it is a “power of delusion.” This translates into “deluding influence.” Lenski comments on the KJV translation, “strong delusion,” and says the KJV has: “‘strong delusion’ as if *energeian* were adjectival; but the governing noun is never adjectival, only the genitive may be, thus here the meaning is not ‘energetic energy,’ (‘strong delusion’)….”[[26]](#footnote-24362)

**“so.”** In the Greek, this phrase is a result clause: the *eis to* with an infinitive construction.[[27]](#footnote-28152) This result clause parallels the result clause in the preceding verse. The unbelievers refused the love of the truth along *with the result* of being saved, and so God sends them a deluding influence *with the result* of believing what is false. These people did not love the truth but rather clung to falsehood and so God gives them what they want. They first chose the result of damnation and believing error, then God honored their decision. God does not inhibit these people’s free will; they have made their free decision and now in an act of judgment God strengthens their position, much like Pharaoh who first hardened his own heart then God hardened it also.

2Th 2:12

**“condemned.”** The Greek word is *krinō* (#2919 κρίνω). Why did Paul use *krinō* and not *katakrinō*, which has the more obvious connotations of judicial punishment and pronouncing of a sentence? The answer is that the connotations of *krinō*’s semantic range fit better with the context. *Krinō* has heavy implications of making a choice or decision, having an opinion; by logical extension, it is used to refer to a judicial decision, hence, “judgment” and then being condemned.[[28]](#footnote-31945) The context of this verse centers around the *choices* of unbelievers. They “took pleasure in” (from *eudokeō*, (#2106 εὐδοκέω), which also means “to choose”) unrighteousness, and they did not accept the love of the truth but opted for falsehood. The unbelievers have made their choice, they have deemed what seems good to them and now in this verse, God is making a choice as shown by the word *krinō*—He shows His divine, judicial opinion of those who did not choose Him, and the people are condemned.

2Th 2:13

**“brothers and sisters.”** The Greek text is “brothers,” but that included both men and women. See Word Study: “Adelphos.”

**“firstfruits for salvation.”** Of all God’s people who will be saved, Christians will be the first to experience the fullness of salvation, and that will be at the Rapture. The Greek word translated “firstfruits” is *aparchē* (#536 ἀπαρχή), which means “firstfruits; the first of a harvest.” We have the firstfruits of the spirit (Rom. 8:23), and we are the firstfruits of those who are saved (cf. James 1:18). How can that be? Our salvation is guaranteed now, and it will be completed when the Rapture happens and we are taken to heaven before those in the First Resurrection are raised from the dead to everlasting life.

“Firstfruits to be saved” has been confusing to commentators because they have not thought of it as a general statement about salvation that applies to all Christians and which is connected to the Rapture. Most have tried to figure out how the Thessalonians as a group were the firstfruits of salvation, which they were not, and this has led to some speculation.

The believers of Thessalonica were not the “firstfruits” to be saved in general or in particular, The Corinthians were the “firstfruits of Achaia” (1 Cor. 16:15) because they were the first believers saved there, and Epaenetus was of the firstfruits of Asia because he was one of the first people saved there (Rom. 16:5). But in Macedonia Paul established the church in Philippi before he established the church in Thessalonica, so the people there were not the firstfruits of Macedonia, nor the firstfruits among the Gentiles.

But there should be no confusion about the Thessalonians to be the firstfruits to be saved, especially when James 1:18 uses “firstfruits” in connection with Christian salvation. The Thessalonians are Christians, and the Christians will be the “firstfruits,” the ones to first experience the fullness of God’s salvation, which will occur at the Rapture.

Some Greek manuscripts of this verse do not read *aparchē*, but instead have “from the beginning” (*ap’ archē*, composed of a contraction of *apo* (#575 ἀπό) meaning “from” and *archē* (#746 ἀρχή) meaning “beginning”) (cf. KJV, NIV). We agree with Metzger’s arguments, that the most likely reading is “firstfruits.”[[29]](#footnote-14095) Paul uses the word for “firstfruits,” *aparchē*, in six other places, and he does not use the term *archē* to refer to the beginning anywhere (except possibly Phil. 4:15). Furthermore, there are other instances when scribes have altered “firstfruits” to “from the beginning,” even though the changes do not fit the context (Rom. 16:5; Rev. 14:4).

Given developing Christian theology and a trend toward predestination, we can see that there would be theological motives for scribes changing “firstfruits” to “beginning,” but there are no such reasons for changing “beginning” to “firstfruits.” Also, the reading “firstfruits” is the more difficult reading, because the Thessalonians were not technically the first people in Europe to whom the Gospel was brought (the people of Philippi were), they were only among the first to be saved. In textual criticism, there is a principle known as *lector difficilis* (“difficult reading”), which says the more difficult reading is likely the original because it would be more likely to be changed by later scribes trying to smooth out the tension in the text. Thus scribes who did not understand how the Thessalonians were chosen as firstfruits, and had a theological preference for the reading “from the beginning,” most likely changed the text here from *aparchē* to *ap’ archē*.

[For more on the word “firstfruits,” see commentary on James 1:18. For more on Christians having a promise of salvation now and the fullness of salvation at the Rapture, see commentary on Rom. 10:9, “will be saved.”]

**“through.”** The Greek word is *en* (#1722 ἐν) and here the *en* (“in”) is not an “in” of location such as “in a room,” but is indicating instrumentality and thus marks the means or instrument.[[30]](#footnote-17807)

Lenski points out that the static use of *en* indicates a connection or association. The translator must more specifically define the connection. Thus, for example, when translated with “in Christ” the connection is a union with him (see commentary on Eph. 1:3). Our Christian salvation is connected with the holiness we have as Christians and our belief in the truth: it was by believing in Jesus Christ that we got saved (Eph. 1:13-14; Rom. 10:9). R. C. H. Lenski translates the verse, “in connection with,” and explains why:

“This ἐν is not instrumental, for choosing requires no instrument. …“through” in the AV [KJV] is incorrect for the Greek word for this would be *dia. En* does not mean “in view of” or “in the foreknowledge of.” It does not mean “unto,” the Greek for which would be *eia*. *En* has its first and original meaning: in connection with…. None were chosen by God without this connection.”[[31]](#footnote-24517)

Every Christian was saved and at that instant became holy in the sight of God by virtue of the presence of the holy spirit in them.

[For more on Christians being holy by virtue of the presence of God’s gift of holy spirit born in them, see commentary on Phil. 1:1.]

**“holiness produced by *the* spirit.”** The Greek simply reads “holiness of spirit.” Theologians argue about the meaning of the phrase. The word “spirit” is in the genitive case in Greek, and the phrase “holiness of spirit,” can be, and is usually accepted to mean, “holiness that is produced by the spirit,” the genitive being a genitive of production. That is the most likely meaning here, and it fits with other scriptures, for example, how believers are called “holy ones” (“saints”) even though sometimes we do not act particularly holy.

It should be noted, however, that some theologians say that it refers to the “spirit” being made holy.[[32]](#footnote-10971) Thus if our “spirit” is our attitudes, emotions, etc., (like in the phrase, “poor in spirit”), we would be chosen for salvation in connection with us believing the truth and also our minds and emotions being made holy.

If the verse is saying, “holiness produced by the spirit,” the question, “What is being made holy” is not answered. It is assumed that “we” are being made holy. If the verse is saying that “the spirit is being made holy,” then the question, “What is making the spirit holy,” is not answered. It is assumed that it is the spirit of God that is working in us to make our “spirit,” our attitudes and emotions, holy.

Since the way the Greek reads makes both interpretations possible, it is quite possible that God wants us to consider both options and realize both are true. Unfortunately, although it is possible to word the Greek such that both meanings are possible, if we simply say, “holiness of spirit” in English, the readers are usually just confused. They are not used to the genitive being flexible, and are not generally used to reading “spirit” as the attitudes, thoughts, and emotions. Given that situation, the more likely and more dominant way to translate the verse is that our holiness is produced by, and in concert with, the gift of holy spirit inside us.

[For more on the gift of holy spirit, see Appendix 7: “What is the Holy Spirit?”]

**“belief in the truth.”** Literally, “faith of the truth.” It is the objective genitive, where the word in the genitive case (“truth”) is the object of the head noun (“belief”), thus the idea is “belief in the truth.”

2Th 2:14

**“so you can obtain.”** The translation “so you can obtain” comes from the Greek word *eis* (#1519 εἰς), which the KJV renders as “to.” The problem with the KJV translation is that it misses the meaning of *eis* here, which is to communicate the *purpose* of our calling from God; namely, God called us for the purpose of obtaining the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ. In Greek, *eis* is often used to communicate purpose.[[33]](#footnote-10492) On the other hand, if one is called “to” something, it usually means there is a standard to which one is called to meet. But this is not the meaning of the Greek here. We are not called *to* the obtaining of the Lord’s glory, rather, we are called so that we can obtain the Lord’s glory.

2Th 2:15

**“brothers and sisters.”** See Word Study: “Adelphos.”

**“traditions.”** Scripture uses the word for “traditions,” *paradosis* (#3862 παράδοσις), in both a negative and positive sense; there are good traditions and bad traditions. The word simply refers to instruction that has been passed down, whether good and true instruction, or bad instruction. In the Gospels, it is always used in a negative sense of the Scribes and Pharisees’ “traditions of men,” which hinder the commands of God (Matt. 15:2, 3, 6; Mark 7:3, 5, 8, 9, 13). It is also used in the negative sense in Colossians 2:8. Paul uses the term three times, however, in a positive sense (1 Cor. 11:2; 2 Thess. 2:15; 3:6). We are told to be careful to adhere to the things passed down from Paul, and to remain in them.

**“letter.”** Some scholars say the “letter from us” refers to the letter of 1 Thessalonians, which was also sent from Paul, Silas, and Timothy (i.e., “us”).[[34]](#footnote-12210) However, others believe the letter refers to 2 Thessalonians. It could refer to either or even both, and there may have been other unmentioned correspondence as well.

2Th 2:16

**“and God our Father who loved us.”** It is God who loved us and gave us a good hope (both verbs are masc. singular in the Greek).

**“everlasting.”** The effects of the encouragement last forever for those who are saved.

**“encouragement.”** The Greek word can mean “encouragement,” “comfort,” “consolation,” and more.

2Th 2:17

**“establish.”** The versions are split between the translations “establish” and “strengthen” for *stērizō* (#4741 στηρίζω). The word means both; it refers to an internal strengthening which causes one to be committed and firmly in place. We prefer the translation “establish” over “strengthen” because the former better captures the full sense of the word. In other words, “establish” includes the idea of “strengthen,” but the term “strengthen” does not necessarily contain the idea of being established.

**2 Thessalonians Chapter 3**

2Th 3:1

**“Furthermore.”** The Greek can either be understood as “finally” (the end), or “furthermore” (introducing a new subject). Here, “furthermore” is to be preferred.

**“brothers and sisters.”** See Word Study: “Adelphos.”

**“just as *it is* also among you.”** The phrase has no verb in the Greek text, and so scholars discuss whether Paul is referring to the past (“as it did with you”) or the present (“as it is with you”). Actually, the fact that there is no verb emphasizes simply the fact that the word of the Lord moved and moves swiftly among them, as several scholars point out.

2Th 3:3

**“Wicked One.”** The Greek is *ponēros* (#4190 πονηρός), “pertaining to being morally or socially worthless; therefore, ‘wicked, evil, bad, base, worthless, vicious, and degenerate.’”[[35]](#footnote-23641) *Ponēros* is an adjective, but it is a substantive (an adjective used as a noun).

[For more on substantives, see the commentary on Matt. 5:37.]

The Slanderer is the fount and foundation of wickedness. It was in him that wickedness was first found when he was lifted up with pride and decided to rebel against God. Ever since that time he has been true to his name, “the Wicked One,” and has been doing and causing wickedness wherever he can, which, since he is “the god of this age,” is a considerable amount of wickedness.

[For more names of the Slanderer (the Devil) and their meanings, see Appendix 8: “Names of the Devil.”]

2Th 3:4

**“confidence in the Lord concerning you.”** The word for “concerning” comes from the Greek preposition *epi* (#1909 ἐπί). In this case, *epi* does not here have its usual meaning of “over” or “upon.” Rather, it is functioning as a “marker of feelings directed toward someone.”[[36]](#footnote-18564) Paul is expressing his feelings of confidence toward the Thessalonians.

2Th 3:6

**“brothers and sisters.”** The Greek word *adelphoi* (typically translated “brothers”) is often not gender exclusive, in other words, it often refers to both genders.

[See Word Study: “Adelphos.”]

**“in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.”** This phrase means, in essence, “by the authority of Jesus Christ.” It is a cultural phrase that refers to the authority a person has due to his relationship with the one being named, who in this case is Jesus Christ. In Christian culture, “the name of Jesus Christ” gave the user authority, just as using the name of any other ruler or great person would give the one who used it authority.

[For more on the name of Jesus Christ, see commentary on Acts 3:6.]

**“disorderly.”** The word “disorderly” comes from the Greek *ataktōs* (#814 ἀτάκτως). The term has been translated in numerous ways: “idleness,” “unruly,” “irresponsible,” “undisciplined,” and “disorderly.” Etymologically, it comes from the prefix *a*-, meaning “not,” and *taktōs*, meaning “in order,” “proper”; and so literally, the word means “not in order,” or “not proper.” The word does not specifically refer to “idleness,” as many versions translate it (E.g., ESV, NRSV), but rather speaks more of improper behavior generally. Although, from the context of the epistle we can see that the disorderly behavior was idleness: “the specific manner in which the irresponsible behavior manifests itself is described in the context: freeloading, sponging.”[[37]](#footnote-15195)

2Th 3:8

**“bread.”** Put by the figure of speech metonymy for food in general, and can even extend beyond food to the basic necessities of life.

[See figure of speech “metonymy.”]

**“bread...without paying *for it*.”** This is more literally, “bread as a gift. The Greek noun *dōrean* (#1432 δωρέαν) is functioning as an adverb (cf. 2 Cor. 11:7; Paul preached “as a gift,” that is, without asking for payment).

2Th 3:10

**“and indeed.”** The Greek reads *kai gar*. The word *gar* is often used as a logical connection, “for,” but here it is not so used. There is more of a break intended. Lenski calls this the “confirmatory *gar*,” which does not imply a logical connection from what proceeds, rather it simply confirms it—hence the translation “indeed.”[[38]](#footnote-27585) See commentary on Romans 9:3.

**“used to give.”** Compare the NASB and NET translations. The rendering “used to” comes out of the imperfect tense of the verb. The imperfect tense denotes continual past action—we gave and kept on giving the command—and thus frequently implies habitual, customary behavior. By employing the imperfect tense here, Paul is saying, “It was our custom to give you this command while we were with you.” This is a good reminder that we ought to continuously teach and reteach the truths of proper Christian living—we must relay the commands of the Lord again and again.

**“do not let him eat.”** The verb “eat” is imperative, giving a strong force to the phrase.

2Th 3:11

**“not *busy* working, but are *just* busybodies.”** The Greek of this phrase contains a play on words—it is the figure of speech paregmenon, the repetition of words derived from the same root.[[39]](#footnote-10906) In Greek, the words “busy working” and “busybodies” have the same root word meaning “work,” but the word “busybodies” adds *peri* as a prefix—*ergazomai* (#2038 ἐργάζομαι) and *peri-ergazomai* (#4020 περιεργάζομαι). The word *ergazomai* is usually translated simply “work,” however, in this case, to capture the play on words, it was translated “busy working.” It is fitting that Paul writes this admonition to the Thessalonian church. It was at Thessalonica that wicked men who were not working but were loitering at the marketplace formed a mob against Paul and company in Acts 17:5, and the Thessalonian believers would have known about that and understood the danger in not working.

2Th 3:12

**“in the *name of the* Lord Jesus Christ.”** For a similar phrase in this context, see 2 Thessalonians 3:6.

**“working.”** See commentary on 2 Thessalonians 3:11. This is the same word.

**“in a quiet fashion.”** The description “quiet” is adverbial, describing how they are to work. The term does not literally mean there is to be no talking during work hours, but, referring to the previous verse, they are not to be busybodies.

**“to eat their own bread.”** This is an idiomatic way of saying “earn your own living” (ESV, NRSV), i.e., you work, make money, buy food, and then you eat it. We might say “pay your own way.”

2Th 3:13

**“brothers and sisters.”** See Word Study: “Adelphos.”

**“do not grow weary in doing what is good.”** This verse is very close to Galatians 6:9.

2Th 3:14

**“in this letter.”** The Greek does not read “in,” but “through,” from the preposition *dia* (#1223 διά), which is here used to indicate *means by which*. The understanding is, “our word [which came] through the means of this letter.” Compare also the usage of *dia* in 2 John 1:12: “Though I have many things to write to you, I don’t want to do so **with** [Greek: *dia*] paper and ink.”

**“so that.”** The Thessalonians are to avoid such a brother with the *purpose* of his being shamed, and with the *result* that he is in fact shamed. This is a purpose-result clause.

[For more information, see the word study on “hina.”]

**“put to shame.”** This verb is in the passive voice, meaning the action of shaming comes upon the brother, rather than describing his internal state. It is not “be ashamed,” which would imply the feelings rise up in the person himself; rather, the shaming comes upon him, he is “put to shame.”

2Th 3:15

**“brother or sister.”** The Greek word ἀδελφός was used in the culture to refer to fellow believers, whether men or women.

[See Word Study: “Adelphos.”]

2Th 3:16

**“may.”** The verb translated “may…give” is in the optative mood, which expresses Paul’s wish—thus the translation “may.” Though the Western text also has the optative mood of this verb, the KJV does not render it correctly, but puts the verse as a command of sorts to God: “Now the Lord of peace himself give you peace…” This translation is unfortunate because the optative does not express a command, but rather Paul’s heart for the Thessalonians.

**“at all times.”** This phrase is a Greek idiom comprised of the words *dia pantos*, literally meaning “through all.” When placed together, *dia pantos* has the meaning of “always” or “continually.”[[40]](#footnote-10632)

**“in every way.”** The word “way” is from the Greek *tropos* (#5158 τρόπος), meaning “manner,” “way,” or “kind.” The meaning is that Paul wishes that in every different manner God can bring peace, may he do it. Cf. the KJV, “by all means.”

**“The Lord be with you all.”** The Greek text does not have “be” in the sentence, but the sentence makes sense in Greek without the “to be” verb. This verse at the close of the epistle is a wish and prayer that the Lord would be with the Thessalonians in a powerful and evident way (see commentary on 1 Thess. 5:28). However, due to the way the Greek text is worded, it can also mean “The Lord *is* with you all.” While that is not the primary meaning in this context, it is a legitimate translation and meaning of the Greek, and is true. Thus, by wording the Greek the way it is, Paul expresses his prayer that the Lord be actively with the Thessalonians to help and guide them, while at the same time reminding them that the Lord is in fact with them. It is possible to look at this verse as the figure of speech amphibologia, where one thing is said, but two things are meant.

[See figure of speech “amphibologia.”]

2Th 3:17

**“with my own hand.”** Paul usually wrote some kind of closing to his epistles in his own handwriting. See commentary on Galatians 6:11.

**“this is how I write.”** Meaning, this is how I sign my letters. Paul is not saying “this is how I write my epistles.” Paul is validating the epistle; he is signing his name so to speak. It is likely that he is writing this in response to counteract people who were writing to the Thessalonians claiming to be Paul himself (2 Thess. 2:2). In this verse, Paul is assuring his readers how to tell which letters are genuinely from him, and which are not.

2Th 3:18

**“be with you all.”** This is very similar to the ending line of 1 Thessalonians. See the commentary on 1 Thess. 5:28, and compare this verse to 2 Thess. 3:16 above.

**“you all.”** This is different than the way the First Epistle to the Thessalonians ends, which does not have the word “all.” Reading and comparing both the First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians shows that the divisions in the church at Thessalonica were not specifically dealt with in 1 Thessalonians. The church was seen as having persecution problems from the outside, needed knowledge on several different issues, and needed to deal with a couple issues of sin. However, 2 Thessalonians makes it clear that there were believers in the church who were disorderly busybodies (2 Thess. 3:6-12), and some who would not obey Paul’s teaching, with whom the rest of the church was not to associate (2 Thess. 3:14-15). In light of the obvious division in the church, there may have been a temptation to assume that Paul’s wish and prayer for grace was only directed to the believers who were obedient to the doctrine, but Paul makes it clear by placing the word “all” at the end of the sentence that he desires every single Christian to live in the grace of God, and that every single Christian has the grace of God upon him.

1. Kistemaker, *New Testament Commentary*. [↑](#footnote-ref-28527)
2. Daniel Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, 611. [↑](#footnote-ref-20533)
3. Wallace, *Grammar*, 607, 611. [↑](#footnote-ref-24821)
4. Cf. A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, 4:43; cf. BDAG. [↑](#footnote-ref-10422)
5. *Merriam-Webster’s Dictionary of Synonyms*. [↑](#footnote-ref-22682)
6. Bullinger, *Figures of Speech*, 491, “antimereia.” [↑](#footnote-ref-27953)
7. See Wallace, *Grammar*, 89. [↑](#footnote-ref-15059)
8. BDAG, s.v. “θαυμάζω.” [↑](#footnote-ref-31650)
9. Gordon Fee, *The First and Second Letters to the Thessalonians* [NICNT], 267-68 (emphasis the author’s). [↑](#footnote-ref-27610)
10. Cp. Leon L. Morris [NICNT], 214. [↑](#footnote-ref-21140)
11. Kistemaker, *New Testament Commentary*. [↑](#footnote-ref-16685)
12. Cp. Bullinger, *Figures of Speech*, 538, “metonymy.” [↑](#footnote-ref-11849)
13. Bruce [WBC]. [↑](#footnote-ref-20438)
14. See *TDNT*; cf. Friberg’s Lexicon. [↑](#footnote-ref-29045)
15. Cf. BDAG, Bullinger, *EDNT*, Friberg, Louw and Nida, Renn, Thayer, UBS, and Vine. [↑](#footnote-ref-11972)
16. Cf. Wuest, *Word Studies*. [↑](#footnote-ref-12562)
17. Cp. Ernest Best, *First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians* [BNTC]. [↑](#footnote-ref-19954)
18. Lenski, *Interpretation of St. Paul’s Epistles to the Colossians and Thessalonians*, 411-12. [↑](#footnote-ref-15052)
19. Bullinger, *Figures of Speech*, 943, “erotesis.” [↑](#footnote-ref-14325)
20. e.g. Lenski, Colossians and Thessalonians, 416; Kistemaker. [↑](#footnote-ref-28894)
21. Kistemaker. [↑](#footnote-ref-20162)
22. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, 535-36. [↑](#footnote-ref-22954)
23. Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 536. [↑](#footnote-ref-24735)
24. Cp. Bullinger, *Figures of Speech*, 804, “amphibologia.” [↑](#footnote-ref-13263)
25. For the *eis to* with an infinitive construction and result clauses, see Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 592-93, 611. [↑](#footnote-ref-16528)
26. Lenski, *Colossians and Thessalonians*, 431. [↑](#footnote-ref-24362)
27. for the *eis to* + infinitive construction and result clauses, see Wallace, *Greek Grammar*,592-93, 611. [↑](#footnote-ref-28152)
28. BDAG, s.v. “κρίνω.” [↑](#footnote-ref-31945)
29. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, 636-37; see also Roger Omanson, *A Textual Guide to the Greek New Testament*. [↑](#footnote-ref-14095)
30. See BDAG, s.v. “ἐν.” [↑](#footnote-ref-17807)
31. Lenski, *St. Paul’s Epistles to the Colossians and Thessalonians*, 441. [↑](#footnote-ref-24517)
32. E.g. Lenski, *Colossians and Thessalonians*, 440. [↑](#footnote-ref-10971)
33. BDAG, s.v. “εἰς,” def. 4f. [↑](#footnote-ref-10492)
34. Cp. Lenski, *Colossians and Thessalonians*, 443-44. [↑](#footnote-ref-12210)
35. BDAG, s.v. “πονηρός.” [↑](#footnote-ref-23641)
36. BDAG, s.v. “ἐπί,” def. 15. [↑](#footnote-ref-18564)
37. BDAG, s.v. “ἀτάκτως.” [↑](#footnote-ref-15195)
38. Lenski, *Colossians and Thessalonians*, 461. [↑](#footnote-ref-27585)
39. Bullinger, *Figures of Speech*, 304, “paregmenon.” [↑](#footnote-ref-10906)
40. BDAG, s.v. “διά,” def. 2a. [↑](#footnote-ref-10632)