

An Introduction to the Second Epistle to the Thessalonians

THE REASONS FOR WRITING THE SECOND EPISTLE

The Reason For Writing the First Letter

We have seen that Paul wrote the First Epistle because he had a pastoral care for his converts. He had been forcibly cast out of three places in which he had preached, firstly Philippi, then Thessalonica itself, and finally Berea (Acts 16:12-17:34). In addition he had not been accepted at Athens. He had gone from there to Corinth where he was 'in much fear and trembling'. His ministry had flourished in Corinth and yet much in his mind was this rather unusual church of Thessalonica, and when Silas and Timothy reached there (Acts 18:5) Paul's ministry seems to have been further encouraged. He was relieved to hear about the church which he had left under the coverage of Silas and Timothy, and so he wrote the first letter, reminding them of the marvellous way they had responded to the Gospel, what a love there had been between him and them. As we have seen he gave them very helpful teaching, particularly on the manner of Christian living, much of which referred to practical holiness.

The latter part of the letter referred to the second coming of Christ, because some seemed to have lost heart because friends had died before the Parousia (Christ's appearing). He had shown that Christ's coming would bring with it the saints who had died, and together all believers would rejoice in the transformation that that coming would bring to all presently living.

The Reason For the Second Letter

It is clear from this letter that between the writing of the former letter and this letter some misunderstanding had arisen about the Parousia. Some thought that the Day of the Lord had already come, and Paul set out to correct this idea. In the first chapter he speaks of the coming of the Lord which is to bring judgement to those opposing the Gospel, and joy to those obeying it. In the second chapter Paul sets out to correct wrong ideas about the immediacy of the second coming. Certain things must first happen in history and this 'little apocalypse' of Paul is fascinating, instructive and revealing.

A second problem had arisen from the first. Because some thought the Parousia was imminent, they ceased to have interest in the normal processes of life, particularly in working for a living. Some of these had become idlers. The heart of Paul's instruction was, 'If any man will not work, neither let him eat.' Following this was an exhortation to live quietly and to persist in well-doing.

The Second Epistle is most informative and can be read at this moment as most helpful.

An Outline of the Letter

Chapter One.

1. The Salutation. 1:1-2.
2. Thanksgiving. 1:3-5.
3. Encouragement and Divine judgement. 1:6-10.
4. Paul's prayer for the Church 1:11-12.

Chapter Two.

1. The day of the Lord has not yet happened. 2:1-2
2. The great rebellion to take place. 2:3-12
 - (a) The Man of Lawlessness. 2:3-10 (a).
 - (b) The action of God on followers of the Lawless One. 2: 10(b)-12.
3. Thanksgiving, encouragement and prayer for the converts. 2:13-17.

Chapter Three.

1. Request for prayer. 3:1-2.
2. God's faithfulness. Paul's confidence and prayer. 3:3-5.
3. The disorderly. 3:6-13.
4. The disobedient. 3:14-15.
5. The closing of the Letter. 3:17-18.