

Message #1**Various Texts**

One of the best selling series of books of our time has been the “Left Behind” series by Jerry Jenkins and Tim LaHaye. I have not read them all, but I know many of you have and from what I can gather, in what I have read, they are very accurate in presenting a true doctrinal pre-tribulation and pre-millennial eschatology.

Now the first book of the Left Behind series came out in 1995. From 1995 until 2007, sixteen total novels were published in the series. One book became a sequel for another book and ultimately those books take you from the Rapture all the way through the Tribulation. In 1998, the first four books ended up holding the top four slots of the New York Times best seller list. This did not even include sales in Christian book stores. The total amount of sales for the series has now surpassed 65 million copies and seven of the sixteen have reached the number one best seller list of USA Today and Publishers Weekly. That is exciting that a sequel series can make this kind of impact.

There are a series of sequels series that is even more impacting than this. In fact, these sequels are inspired by God. We have the privilege of carefully analyzing these sequels in the Bible in which more than one letter is written to a church or individual. For example, II Corinthians is the sequel to I Corinthians. II Timothy is the sequel to I Timothy. II Peter is the sequel to I Peter. II John is the sequel to I John and III John is the sequel to II John. We may be sure that when God includes a sequel letter or epistle in His Word, it is extremely important and serious.

Of all the sequel books of the New Testament, perhaps none are more interesting and prophetically impacting than II Thessalonians, which is the sequel to I Thessalonians. Frankly, there is no book quite like it. It is an epistle the Thessalonians needed and so do we. In the next few Sundays we would like to analyze this little yet powerful epistle and take you straight through it.

To approach it we want to do so in question/answer fashion by answering five questions:

QUESTION #1 – Why study II Thessalonians?

There are six reasons we are going to study this book:

Reason #1 - Because II Thessalonians is one of only 66 inspired books of God.

God only has 66 inspired books and we need to crawl through every word of every book. We may remember Paul said in I Thessalonians 5:27–“have this letter read to all the brethren.” Every single word of Scripture is to be read and taught. The evidence that this is an inspired book of God is overwhelming. In fact, one commentator said, “The external evidence...of the Second Epistle to the Thessalonians is even stronger than ...the First Epistle” (*Pulpit Commentary*, Vol. 21, p. i).

We may easily confirm that this is, in fact, an inspired book of God just by manuscripts of II Thessalonians which God has preserved.

First, near Dublin, is a museum called the Beatty Museum. In that museum is a manuscript called p46. The manuscript consists of slightly mutilated leaves of papyrus paper which are 11 by 6 ½ inches and the original contained 104 pages of Paul's epistles. In this manuscript was II Thessalonians. By the way, today 30 of the 86 surviving leaves of the Beatty papyri manuscripts are owned by *The Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, the University of Michigan Library*. They are actually housed in Ann Arbor.

The Greek manuscript known as the Codex Sinaiticus (A.D. 340), which was found in a monastery at Mount Sinai, contains II Thessalonians.

The Greek manuscript known as the Codes Alexandrinus (A.D. 450), which is comprised of 134 pages written on paper which is 10 ¼ by 12 inches and written in two columns of 50-51 lines per page contains II Thessalonians.

All of this manuscript evidence establishes that II Thessalonians is a God-inspired, God-preserved book which belongs in the Bible.

Second, the evidence that II Thessalonians is an inspired book of the Bible is clearly seen in the fact that **all of the church council meetings deemed it so**. The council of Nicea (A.D. 325); the Council of Hippo (A.D. 393); the Council of Carthage of A.D. 397 and A.D. 419 all list it as an inspired book of God.

Third, all of the canon listings—Marcion (A.D. 140); Muratorian (A.D. 170); Apostolic (A.D. 300); Cheltenham (A.D. 360); and Athanasius (A.D. 367) all list this as an inspired book of God.

Fourth, when Ignatius (A.D. 110) was en route to martyrdom in Rome, he wrote a series of letters and one was written to the church of Rome, and in that letter he quoted II Thessalonians 3:5.

Fifth, when Polycarp, who was a disciple of the Apostle John, wrote a letter to the Philippians, he quoted II Thessalonians 1:4 and 3:15.

Sixth, II Thessalonians was specifically cited as an authentic inspired book of God by Irenaeus (A.D. 130); Eusebius (A.D. 325); Jerome (A.D. 340); Augustine (A.D. 400). Clearly II Thessalonians is one of the rare inspired books of God.

Now since all of this proves that this is an inspired book of God, then we pose one question. How many words of the epistle should we try to understand? Just a couple weeks ago, a man said to me, "You know in most churches no one takes the beginning of a book or the last few words of a book very seriously. They just gloss over them with the mindset that we need to get on to the real important stuff."

However, if every word is actually inspired in Scripture, then should we not carefully do our best to understand every word of the text? That is exactly what we will attempt to do in the next weeks in II Thessalonians. This is an inspired book of God.

Reason #2 - Because specific data concerning the Antichrist is data that is only found in II Thessalonians. **2:3-12**

One of the arguments liberal scholars used against this book is that in I Thessalonians it teaches the church that Jesus Christ could come back at any moment; but II Thessalonians teaches there will be specific signs and a specific man of sin who will surface. Well, the obvious solution is that they are describing two time moments: one is the Rapture of the Church and the other is the Great Tribulation.

Many people have speculated that they think President Obama could be the Antichrist. The fact is the Antichrist will not surface until after we are gone. Having carefully studied biblical data about the Antichrist, my conclusion is he is not him. He is not smart enough to be him and he certainly does not appear to want to be Israel's ally and friend and rebuild her Temple. He appears more of a friend to Islamists. So I don't think he is the Antichrist. The Antichrist will be a political player from the European world who will rise up after the Rapture and II Thessalonians makes that chronology very clear.

The specific information we get from this book about the Antichrist has made a great prophetic impression on the church. In fact, II Thessalonians gives us great details concerning the Antichrist and this has been recognized ever since the days of the early church. For example, in A.D. 178, Irenaeus wrote: "And again in the Second Epistle to the Thessalonians, speaking of the Antichrist, Paul says, 'And then shall that wicked one be revealed whom the Lord Jesus shall slay with the spirit of his mouth, and destroy with the presence of his coming' (ch. ii. 8)" (*Ibid*, p. i).

Now there are many places where we get data concerning the Antichrist. We get a lot of information about him in the book of Daniel and we most definitely do in the book of Revelation. But Paul's chronological breakdown of this information adds great detail to both of these books and without II Thessalonians, our knowledge of the Antichrist would be greatly lacking.

There is a satanic man who will surface who is very graphically described by Paul in II Thessalonians and obviously God wants us to know about him.

Reason #3 - Because II Thessalonians shows the importance of knowing precise eschatology. **2:2**

Make no mistake about this fact; if we are not precise in our doctrine of future events, our faith and our composure may be shaken and we can become greatly disturbed.

Now having gone through I Thessalonians, we know that Paul spent a great deal of time teaching this church things about biblical prophecy. He taught them about the Pre-Tribulation Rapture of the Church (I Thessalonians 4). He taught them about the Day of the Lord Great Tribulation, which is a time of wrath, which will come after the Rapture of the Church (I Thessalonians 5:1-11).

Paul went to great detail to straighten out faulty thinking about God's future program. He wanted these believers to be very precise in their understanding of prophetic truth. Some people think it is irrelevant if you know true prophecy. We have known of more than one person who says what does it really matter what you believe about the future, the important thing is you are saved. In fact, some people actually think you aren't supposed to know biblical prophecy. Well, it matters a great deal to your spirituality. II Thessalonians 2:2-3 makes it clear that if you do not accurately know biblical prophecy, you can be quickly shaken and disturbed in your faith and you can be deceived.

I knew of a denominational preacher who told his people the book of Revelation is not a prophetic book for us to study and understand. Well, Paul didn't agree with that. Precise prophecy does matter to your spirituality and II Thessalonians teaches it is a key to being unstable or stable in your faith. **II Thessalonians gives is an eschatology that makes us stable in our faith.**

It is clear that I & II Thessalonians deals extensively with the subject of true biblical prophecy. In fact, D. Edmund Hiebert said these two epistles are known "as the eschatological epistles among the Pauline writings" (*The Thessalonians Epistles*, p. 263).

So the next time you run into someone who is propagating some prophecy perspective that is distorted, ask them this question—"Have you ever carefully and systematically gone through the books of I & II Thessalonians? Have you gone through it word for word, line upon line, precept upon precept?" If you don't do that, your view of church prophecy will be lacking because I & II Thessalonians present a precise eschatology.

Reason #4 - Because II Thessalonians prevents believers from living a prophetic fanaticism.
3:10-12

Now apparently some in the church were confused about how prophecy is supposed to affect us and it was causing, as one writer said, "a state of wild excitement." Some form of eschatological fanaticism had broke loose in some of the Thessalonians to the extent that some people were not even working and were living idle and useless lives as they waited for future events to unfold. Every now and then you run across some distorted Christian who thinks because he is going to heaven it really doesn't matter whether or not he has a job or maintains a good business name. I knew of one person who didn't even care if he paid his bills, thinking "I'll be raptured so who cares?" Well, God cares. God does not want us to become some religious fanatic who abandons responsibilities in life.

Every now and then we hear of some fanatical religious group that abandons social responsibilities and moves to some commune to wait for the end of the world. Apparently some form of that was happening in the church of Thessalonica and Paul wrote to combat that.

Reason #5 - Because II Thessalonians teaches us that we can trust that God will track down and pour out righteous revenge on those who afflict us. **1:6-9**

Just recently, I heard an interview with the judge from Florida who had presided over the Casey Anthony case. Casey Anthony is the woman who murdered her baby daughter and the jury let her go. Well, the judge said she may have beaten the court system, but there is the highest judge of all that she will face and that is Almighty God.

We live in an era when people want to be so politically correct and never threaten or warn about any pending judgment of God. We live in a day in which everyone wants to hear about a God who loves and loves and loves and would never do anything that would hurt anyone. Well, nothing is further from the truth and this book of II Thessalonians makes that point crystal clear.

God is a God of vengeance. People who afflict God's people will pay a severe price. God is in the business of tracking down afflicting culprits and paying them back with His vengeance. II Thessalonians makes that point very, very clear.

Reason #6 - Because II Thessalonians teaches us that our Gospel presentation needs to warn people of eternal burning in hell. **1:7-9**

We live in a time when most people want to hear they are all okay with God and all religions are good. We live in a time when many think it is real scholarly and cute to promote a false, devilish, heretical religion like Islam. Well, II Thessalonians presents an entirely different message. According to this book, you don't go around telling the Mormons or Muslims that they are fine. In fact, when I was in school Mr. Miles made us memorize these verses so we could accurately communicate truth.

Now look carefully at **II Thessalonians 1:7-9**; if you do not know God and do not obey the Gospel of Christ and believe on Him, you will suffer the eternal destruction of the fires of hell. People who reject Jesus Christ will burn in flaming fires of hell forever.

When we run across people who talk generically about the end of the world or the apocalypse, we should be ready to say don't worry about the end of the world, you need to worry about the end of you; because if you reject Jesus Christ, you will burn forever in hell—you have God's Word on that point.

For these reasons we are going to study II Thessalonians. We need a good dose of this.

QUESTION #2 – Who wrote II Thessalonians?

Well, the answer to that is clearly seen in two places in the epistle: II Thessalonians 1:1 and 3:17. **It is stated point blank that II Thessalonians was written by the Apostle Paul.**

In fact, one biblical scholar observed that the Pauline authorship of II Thessalonians is stronger in evidence than even I Thessalonians and there is plenty of evidence for I Thessalonians.

Eusebius, the father of church history, said, “Paul...was obviously and unmistakably the author of fourteen epistles...”. He goes on to say that some questioned whether or not he wrote Hebrews (*The History of the Church*, p. 108).

When you read the letter, it breathes Paul. It has his character and his grammatical style. William Hendricksen pointed out that if you take the percentage of Pauline words that he typically uses, there are more of them in II Thessalonians than in I Thessalonians (*Thessalonians*, p. 27).

There are specific phrases in II Thessalonians that are only found in the writings of Paul. For example, phrases like “obey the Gospel” (1:8); “our gospel” (2:14) are specifically Pauline.

Clearly II Thessalonians was written by Paul.

QUESTION #3 – When did Paul write II Thessalonians?

We have already discussed in our exposition of I Thessalonians the fact that Paul was in Corinth when he wrote I Thessalonians. Shortly after writing I Thessalonians, while he was still in Corinth, he received some more news about things that were happening in Thessalonica.

The church had received some faulty doctrine about biblical prophecy and so Paul immediately wrote a follow-up epistle from Corinth somewhere near the year A.D. 50-51. Some say it was written just a few days after I Thessalonians and some say it could have been up to a year later. Probably it was written just a few weeks after I Thessalonians. **Most believe it was written two to three months after he wrote I Thessalonians in A.D. 50-51.**

QUESTION #4 – What prompted the writing of II Thessalonians?

Apparently, the Thessalonians received some pseudo-letter that had some quirky teachings about biblical prophecy (II Thess. 2:2). It must have been some forgery done by someone claiming it was a letter of Paul. When someone says you believe something you don't believe or said something you did not say, it is upsetting not just to Paul, but to the whole church.

It was very confusing to the church because it was presenting the notion that they were already in the Great Tribulation.

Now apparently the church was in the process of going through some persecution and hardship and in the midst of that, this fraudulent letter surfaced which contradicted what Paul wrote in I Thessalonians. We may recall that he taught the people the church would be raptured and they would not be here for the Day of Wrath. They were sons of light not destined for wrath (I Thessalonians 4:13-5:9).

Because of the negative things, someone forged a letter telling the church that they were in the Tribulation and were experiencing the Day of the Lord judgments. They may have meant well, but they were wrong. It was affecting the people in a bad way. This is what prompted Paul to immediately write.

Lewis Sperry Chafer loved Dallas Theological Seminary and one of the hallmark themes of Dallas Seminary was the grace of God. Mr. Miles, who studied under Dr. Chafer, back in 1939, said he grounded you in the grace of God.

This theme of the grace of God has come under attack specifically by proponents of a heretical teaching called "Lordship Salvation." A key leader of this movement is John McArthur, who said many Dallas teachers are softening their position on the grace of God. Well, if Dr. Chafer were still alive, he would fire faculty members and fight for truth.

The teaching that the church is in the Tribulation or going into the Tribulation is very disturbing. **It will never affect the church in a good way.** If we are not going to be raptured but are heading into the Day of Wrath, it does shake up your faith. Paul wrote them in II Thessalonians to straighten this all out.

QUESTION #5 – What is the theme of II Thessalonians?

Well, Paul grounded these Thessalonians in true biblical prophecy. Paul loved this church of the Thessalonians. They were thinking people. He did not want them confused about biblical prophecy. So he wrote them a sequel and the primary point of it is this:

GOD WANTS HIS PEOPLE TO HAVE STEADFAST HEARTS AND UNSHAKEABLE FAITH AND GODLY LIVES, AND A KEY TO THIS IS THAT GOD'S PEOPLE ACCURATELY KNOW PRECISE ESCHATOLOGY PERTAINING TO THE FUTURE RAPTURE AND TRIBULATION.

We are going to carefully go through II Thessalonians, and when we are done you will know exactly what God wants you to know about the future.

But we cannot conclude this without giving you a warning. If you are not a believer in Jesus Christ, you need to know you are heading to eternal destruction in the flaming fire of hell. You will not escape. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved.