

Reading Together
New Testament Bible Reading
September 12 - 18

Monday, September 12 – Thessalonians 2: 1 – 12

In these verses Paul gives some very specific information regarding the second coming of Jesus Christ. There were some in the church at Thessalonica who thought that the Day of the Lord had already come, meaning that Christ had returned, and they had missed it. But Paul tells the Thessalonians that Jesus could not possibly have returned because certain events had not yet happened. There is much debate as to the meaning of what Paul says in these verses. Many commentators believe that the Man of Lawlessness that Paul refers to in verse 3 is the Anti-Christ—a human being who stands opposed to Christ. Look at the description of this person in verse 4. This person will be a person who will stand in direct opposition to God and everything God stands for, and ultimately he will set himself up to be God. Verse 7 tells us that this power of lawlessness is already at work, but is being restrained by somebody or someone. Who is the person who is holding it back? Some think it is the Archangel Michael, some think this is referring to the Gospel, others feel like it is the power of the church. Ultimately whatever it is that is restraining lawlessness is doing it through the power of God. At some point, Paul tells us the power that restrains lawlessness will be taken out of the way and then the Anti-Christ, the Man of Lawlessness, will appear only to be destroyed once and for all by Christ (verse 8). These events are what will usher in the return of Christ. The real important thing to take away from Paul's teaching in these verses is not who the Man of Lawlessness is, but that we, as followers of Christ, not be deceived by him (verses 9-12).

Tuesday, September 13 – 2 Thessalonians 2: 13 – 3: 5

Verses 13 and 14 of chapter 2 are important verses for us to take note of. Notice first that Paul makes the point that our salvation is a work of God from start to finish, all that we can do is be willing participants in that work allowing God to work in our lives. It is God who chose us, God who calls us, God who sanctifies us (makes us holy) so that we can glorify Him. That is why Paul prays in verses 16-17 that our encouragement, hope and strength to do whatever we do comes from God. Finally, Paul asks for prayer for himself and his co-workers. Paul's prayer request is that the Kingdom of Christ would advance as a result of their work and that they would be protected from evil as they endeavor to serve the Lord.

Wednesday, September 14 – 2 Thessalonians 3: 6 – 18

As Paul closes out his letter to the Thessalonians he makes a few very strong and pointed remarks about idleness (being lazy). This idleness

probably sprang from the Thessalonians being so caught up in worrying about the Day of the Lord (end times). In their thinking what is the point of working hard if Jesus was coming soon? Look at verse 11, rather than being busy, these folks were busybodies. We all tend to keep busy somehow, either by working or being busy meddling in other people's lives. If we stay productively busy, we have less time to do unproductive things like meddle and gossip. In these verses, Paul is very clear that the church should not tolerate laziness in any form. In verse 6 he tells them not to even associate with those who are lazy. In verses 7-9, Paul tells them that laziness was not the pattern that they saw in Paul's life when he was with them. Paul worked hard both at ministry and at providing for his own needs (verse 8), and he says the reason he did was to be an example for them to follow. Verse 10 is very practical advice for the time we live in, "If a man will not work, he shall not eat." What Paul is telling the Church is that the Church has no responsibility to those who have needs because they are too lazy to deal with those needs themselves.

Thursday, September 15 – Jude 1

The Book of Jude is a letter that was written by Jude, the half brother of Jesus. It was written at a time when the early Christians were beginning to feel the effects of both persecution from the Roman Empire, and false teachings known as Gnosticism, which brought doctrinal error to the church. The purpose of the book is to confront those false teachings (apostasy—turning away from the truth).

Verse 1 tells us that this letter is written to believers in general as opposed to a specific group of believers, and in verse 3 Jude tells us that he wrote this letter to urge us to fight for our faith. In verse 4 Jude tells us exactly what his concerns are—that there are some who have slipped into the church who are godless using grace as an excuse to sin, and denying that Jesus is Lord. In verses 5-8, Jude uses very different examples to remind his readers what happens to those who exchange the truth for a lie. First, he reminds them of the unfaithful Israelites who were struck down by God in the wilderness on their exodus from Egypt because they did not truly believe. Then Jude reminds his readers that even angels are not immune from God's punishment (verse 6), and finally he reminds his readers of those who lived in Sodom and Gomorrah who were punished with fire and brimstone for the sexual immorality. Jude's point in these verses is that it doesn't matter if you are an angel, one who was called by God or a pagan, if you disobey God and turn away from the truth God's wrath will rest upon you.

Look at the description of these people who have snuck into the church in verses 8- 16: they degrade their own bodies through their sexual misconduct; they speak against God and his authority; they speak abusively about what they don't understand; they are blemishes on the

church (the love feast in verse 12 was what the early church called communion); they take care of only themselves; they are fruitless; they are always stirring up trouble.

Jude makes a number of Old Testament references that we need to understand as we read his letter. The first of these is found in verse 9 where Jude references a dispute between the archangel Michael and Satan concerning the body of Moses. This is probably a reference to Deuteronomy 34 concerning where Moses was buried. As you read that passage you see that God did not want the Israelites to know where Moses was buried, so they would not worship him at his grave. Most scholars believe that this dispute between Satan and Michael was over where Moses would be buried. The important thing is that Michael relied on God to accuse Satan rather than himself. In verse 11 there is a reference to Cain (Genesis 4), who chose to kill his brother Abel rather than please God; Balaam (Numbers 22-25), who took money from the king of Moab for devising a plan to lead Israel into immorality and idolatry; Korah ((Numbers 16), who rebelled against Moses' leadership.

In verse 14, Jude makes reference to a prophecy of Enoch (Genesis 5) concerning the fate of those who disobey God. This prophecy is not in our Bibles, but was revealed to Jude by the Holy Spirit. The important thing to notice in this prophecy is the way it parallels the account of Christ's return in Revelation 19 and 20.

Finally in verses 17-25, Jude calls on his readers to persevere by building themselves up in their faith and remaining centered in Christ's love. As overlooked as the book of Jude often is, the last two verses are a benediction that is well known to all who are regular attenders of church. This benediction is a reminder that it is ultimately God who will preserve, protect us, and keep us from falling.

Friday, September 16 – Romans 1: 1 – 17

The book of Romans was written by the Apostle Paul to the church in Rome. This church formed as a result of Christians who moved to Rome and brought the gospel with them. It is one of the few churches in the New Testament that was not started directly by one of the Apostles. Paul's letter was written as an instruction in basic Christianity to this church. Because of this, Romans is perhaps the most complete and concise statement of Christianity in the New Testament.

Paul's greeting in verses 1-7 gives the story of the gospel through the whole Bible, so that we can know that it was God's plan all along to rescue us from our sin. Verse 2 tells us that the Gospel was promised through the Old Testament prophets, verse 3 tells us that Jesus was a human descendant of David (fulfilling God's promise to David that someone from his family line would rule over Israel forever (2 Samuel 7). Jesus was declared to be the Son of God by the Holy Spirit (Matthew 3:

16-17), and he is Lord because through his resurrection he has defeated the power of Satan, sin and death. Jesus is also the reason why Paul is laboring so intently to bring the Gospel to the ends of the earth.

Part of Paul's desire to bring the Gospel to the ends of the earth is to see the church well established in Rome. In verses 8 – 14 Paul expresses his strong desire to visit these new believers. At this point he has not yet been able to go to Rome, but he would soon, because he would be taken there to be put on trial before Caesar.

Verses 16-17 are two of the most important verses in all of Paul's writings. In verse 16 Paul speaks about the tremendous power of the Gospel to change lives, and in verse 17, Paul makes it clear that salvation and righteousness is by faith and not by works. This was the verse that started Martin Luther down the path of the Reformation.

Saturday, September 17 – Romans 1: 18 – 32

In this passage Paul points out the wrath of God against the Gentiles (non-Jews). In verses 19 and 20 Paul makes it clear that through creation we should know that there is a God that we owe our allegiance and obedience to. But in verses 21-23, Paul tells us that rather than worshipping God we chose to worship things that were not worthy of our worship. The result of this is we have lost the light of God in our thinking and in our hearts and become fools as a result. That darkness and foolishness leads us into deeper and deeper sin that Paul outlines in verses 24 – 32. These verses point out just how bad our situation is and why we need Jesus so desperately in our lives.

Sunday, September 18 – Romans 2: 1 – 16

As Paul closed Romans 1 he was talking about those who were out and out pagans and had abandoned all thoughts about the true God for thoughts of man-made gods and immorality. Now, as Paul opens chapter 2, he turns his attention to those who might think they are above such behavior, and as a result be tempted to judge others. In verses 1-4 Paul warns us to be careful not to judge others, because in doing so we judge ourselves, since we engage in similar behavior and thoughts.

Paul goes on to warn us that when we judge others we become puffed up with self righteousness, and that keeps us from seeing our own sin and repenting of it. In verses 6-10, Paul points out to us that God's judgment of each one of us will be based on our actions. Be sure to understand that Paul is not teaching that our deeds save us. Remember what Romans 1: 17 said, "For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: 'The righteous will live by faith.'" Our deeds by themselves can only condemn us, if we rely on them to give us righteousness. As Christians our righteousness comes through faith in Christ, but our deeds are the evidence of that faith.